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She stopped, her head lowered and her cheeks on fire.



IN ANOTHER MOMENT

By
CHARLES BELMONT DAVIS

Author of
The Stage Door, The Lodger Overhead, etc.

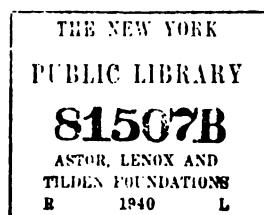
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IN ANOTHER MOMENT



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CHAPTER I

THE Holt House looked, for all the world, like a toy Noah's Ark, resting calmly on the flat bosom of a green paper ocean. The clapboard walls of the old farmhouse glistened proudly in their fresh coat of white paint, and the close-cropped dewy lawn and the flowering orchard shone and sparkled in the morning sun. Both on the links and at the tiny club-house, a hundred yards up the course, there was a distinct air of activity and excitement. Indeed, the day was one of considerable import, both to the caddies and to the young men and old men in flannels, who were gathered about the club-house porch or scattered over the short nine-hole course, trying a few preliminary strokes before the really serious work of the day began.

On the evening previous the little hotel had

opened for the season, and to-day the local golf club had unlocked the door of its club-house and invited the members to begin their tournament for the silver cup offered annually by the club's president. Incidentally, it also happened to be Decoration Day, but there were few heroes' graves to decorate in Pleasantville and so the fact had but little significance and was wholly forgotten long before the luncheon hour.

On account of the general commotion on the links, the porches of the hotel were, with the exception of a solitary figure, quite deserted. The exception was Max Lusk, who was paying his first visit to the Holt House. During the summer previous he had spent a week at one of the large caravansaries on the ocean front, half a mile away, but during that visit his attention had been attracted to the primitive hotel near the banks of the river. The simplicity of the house itself, and the quiet and natural beauty of its surroundings, appealed to him greatly. It had long been Lusk's custom to devote six days of each week to the stock exchange, the Waldorf café, the theaters and various Broadway restaurants, but either from an innate love of the open, or a selfish desire to preserve what little there was left of his health, he in-

J. G. V. N.

variably made a complete change in his routine on the seventh day and spent it as far away as possible from his regular week-day haunts.

On the morning in question he was sitting on the edge of the hotel porch with a golf-bag between his knees and with much care was examining his clubs one by one. An undersized, freckled, native youth, whom he had employed to act as his caddie, stood a few feet away eying his patron with a genuine sporting interest.

"Nickel-plated, ain't they?" suggested the boy.

Lusk nodded. "Yep, saves the price of having 'em cleaned often."

"Oh!" said the caddie, and during the silence that ensued, the small boy in his own way slowly reached the conclusion that, in all probability, Lusk belonged to that class of golfers who invariably pay the caddie the official fee—no less and certainly no more.

A screen door leading into the hotel was thrown open, and a young man came out carrying his golf-bag with him. He was in the early twenties, tall and straight. The easy grace of his swinging gait as he came down the porch, the bronzed face and throat, and the heavily muscled forearm told of much time spent in the open. The young man

glanced down at Lusk and nodded to him cheerfully. But as he was about to hurry on to the club-house the broker stopped him.

"Are you playing in the tournament?" he asked.

The young man seemed to know instinctively what was coming and hesitated. "Yes," he said slowly; "are you?"

"I should think I was," Lusk whined. "They made me pay fifteen dollars, a whole season's subscription, to play for their old mug. Claimed that this tournament was only for members. Now I've joined their dodgasted club, nobody seems to want to go around with me. Have you got a partner?"

The young man inwardly cursed himself for not having properly prepared the night before against such a calamity as this, but he smiled pleasantly and said that he was even then on his way to the club to look for some one to play with.

"Let's go round together," suggested the broker. "My name is Max Lusk."

The young man switched his golf-bag to his left hand and put out a heavy browed right to the broker. "Glad to know you. I'm Porter Fielding. My cousin runs the hotel here."

Lusk got up and the two men, followed by the freckled caddie, started up the course in the direction of the club-house. It was half an hour later before they were allowed to drive off, and then to their dismay they discovered that they had drawn a position just back of two very old men who had a most annoying regard for form and wasted many minutes in practising strokes and in calculating impossible puts.

Lusk played fair golf, but it was the crude game of the self-taught business man who plays for exercise rather than for the love of the sport. For the first few holes he watched the well-nigh perfect form of his companion and became quickly and painfully conscious of the fact that Fielding was easily beating him a stroke a hole. They had caught up with the old men and were seated on a bench waiting for them to drive off.

"It's an awful thing to follow two old geezers like these," Lusk whispered, and then: "Where did you learn your golf, anyhow? You play as if your name might be Mr. Par."

Fielding smiled and swung his driver slowly between his knees. "You see I know this course pretty

well, and then I've been at it a long time. I played pretty steadily at college for four years."

Lusk nodded. "You went to college, eh? Do you live here now?"

"Just at present I do. I taught school at Pleasantville for two winters, and then I went to Jersey City for a year, but I got in wrong. I was in the offices of the Lehigh Valley, but I found out that there was nothing in that. I want to get out on the line if I can; there's more chance for promotion there. I could have the school again this fall if I wanted it, but I don't think I want it."

"You hit it when you admit you got in wrong," Lusk said. "That's the only key to business success. You know what I mean—money success, and if you have money success, you can buy the rest. I don't understand these fathers who let a young cub, just out of college, follow out any old career that he thinks he likes. My idea is never to mind about how small the job or the salary is at the start, but get in right. Break into the game with the big chances. Look at the case of my brother and myself. Our father ran a general store in a one-night stand down South, and we worked for him from the time we were kids and would be there yet if we hadn't got

wise. We gave up twenty-five a week and came to New York and took jobs cleaning out brokers' offices at five and less. And now,—well, I suppose you've heard of Lusk Brothers. We have half a dozen lads in our office who could buy out my old man and his department store ten times over."

Lusk got up from the bench. "We'd better drive as soon as the old one with the whiskers plays his second. They're holding up the whole field. What do you—" He broke off and stood staring wide-eyed at two young women who had just come into the open from a narrow bit of woods that crossed the course. Fielding turned and saw the girls standing behind him.

"Good morning," he said. "Wouldn't you like to go round with us for a few holes?"

The smaller and younger of the two looked up at her companion, but the other smiled and shook her head. "I think not. It's too early and too hot for a walk—we'll sit here and watch you drive off."

"Sorry," said Fielding, and started to tee up his ball. He drove and then gave way to Lusk. Visibly affected by the new arrivals, the broker made his worst effort of the morning and the ball rolled but a few feet in front of him. He turned and found

the older of the girls laughing aloud and rocking back and forth on the bench in a paroxysm of pleasure.

"Miss Clayton," said Fielding, "this is Mr. Lusk. I think you have confused him a little. He really plays a fine game when there's no gallery."

Still smiling, the girl walked over to the blushing broker and held out her hand. "Forgive me, won't you, Mr. Lusk?" she said. "I fear I've ruined your score. Indeed, I'm awfully sorry."

From sheer embarrassment Lusk held her hand for a moment and looked up confusedly at the big smiling eyes, the splendid mass of wavy red hair, the clear pink skin, the delicate nose and ears, the arched scarlet lips and the full rounded throat. To the others it was quite evident that Lusk's continued confusion was not altogether due to the bad drive.

"That's all right, Miss Clayton," he stammered finally. "It's all right. I'm only a duffer at the game, anyhow."

Further conversation was rendered impossible at the moment by the appearance of the next pair of players coming through the woods. Lusk made a low bow. "I hope we'll meet again," he said.

The girl, still smiling, turned toward the bench.

"Of course we'll meet again." And then she threw over her shoulder, "Good luck to you, Mr. Lusk."

The two men played the hole in silence, and it was on their way to the next teeing ground that Lusk spoke again.

"Who is the peach with the red hair—one of the boarders?"

Fielding shook his head. "No—she's a native. Both of those girls live here."

Lusk looked incredulous. "Well, I'll be jiggered! She's a swell-looking girl for a native. Now the other one sort of looks the part."

Fielding smiled at the broker's apparent enthusiasm.

"What kind of folk," asked Lusk, "would a girl like that have, in a small Jersey town like Pleasantville?"

Fielding carefully teed his ball, swung his club several times, and then drove far down the course.

"She hasn't any parents," he said.

"Just growed, eh, like Topsy?" Lusk suggested.

"Not exactly. She was washed up on the beach from a wreck near here at a place they call the Twin Dunes. They found her clinging to her mother's breast. It was a tramp steamer from New Orleans,

carrying beet-sugar. None of the crew was saved, and the mother and the baby were the only passengers. Old man Clayton, who adopted the kid, tried to find something out about the mother at New Orleans but they didn't know anything at the steamship office except that the captain had taken them along as a favor. It seems both the mother and the baby were sickly and had shipped for their health. The Claytons advertised once or twice, but nothing came out of it."

"How about the mother?" asked Lusk. "Dead, eh, when she was washed up?"

"Just about—that is, she never gained consciousness. I've heard she was a real beauty—had a pink skin and red hair—just like Fay's. She was a lady, too, so they say,—good clothes, you know, and that sort of thing."

"And the girl has no idea where she comes from?"

"Not the least. She was only a baby. But the Claytons have treated her exactly like one of their own children. That was their daughter with her just now."

They were playing through the fair green slowly, and constantly being held up by the two old men in

front of them. Fielding continued to play the same even game, but Lusk's whole interest had centered in the history of the Clayton girl.

"Well, how is it," he asked, "that Miss Clayton dresses so well and the other girl so badly?"

Fielding smiled. "Her clothes are no better. I guess she just naturally knows how to wear them, and then she thinks more about it than Margaret."

"It's wonderful how imitative some girls are," said Lusk. "Now, she dresses just as well, apparently, and as simply as any of the city folk down here. I've known several women just like that in New York. Rubes when they first hit the town and in a year swell dressers for fair. Just naturally had the knack. Do they come to the hotel much? I'd like to see the red-haired one again. If I'd only brought my car, we might have had a fine ride to-night."

"I wish you had," Fielding said, smiling, but with just a shade of resentment in his voice at Lusk's familiarity. "However, you'll see them again—they're sure to be about this afternoon when they present the cup. It's quite an event down here."

The two men played on after this in comparative silence. Several times Lusk asked a question about Miss Clayton—nothing of importance, but enough

to show that his mind was still busy with thoughts of the girl.

Late that afternoon, Lusk again met her at the presentation of the cup. She was standing on the outskirts of the crowd that had gathered around the little table on the lawn where the president was about to deliver his speech of congratulation to Fielding who had proved the winner.

Lusk sidled up to Miss Clayton and his strongly Semitic features broke into a smile of greeting. "Glad to see you again. I've been looking all over the place for you."

The girl was looking at Porter Fielding at the time and made no effort to show that she was not much more interested in the president's speech than in the words of the little broker.

"That was very good of you," she said indifferently, and then added with sudden enthusiasm: "Isn't it fine that Porter won the cup; and he deserved it, too! That was a wonderful second round he made. Did you play this afternoon?"

"Not me," Lusk sighed. "I was out of my class altogether," and then hurriedly changing the subject he added: "Fielding says you live here. Must be mighty slow for a girl like you."

She looked down at the smiling eager face of the broker, and her scarlet lips broke into the same cheerful laugh that had first attracted her to him.

"Oh, it's not so bad as that. Pretty quiet in the winter, but there's always something doing in the summer season. Lots of strangers and ocean bathing and sailing on the river and hops at the hotels on Saturday nights."

"Ever been to New York?" Lusk asked.

"Just for the day, two or three times."

"Enjoy yourself?"

"Pretty well. Went to a *matinée* once and vaudeville a couple of times. You can't do much in one day, you know."

Lusk shook his head sympathetically. "That's right, and then New York doesn't wake up until pretty late at night."

The man's eyes ceased their constant habit of shifting and he looked into those of the girl. "Ever think of going on the stage yourself?"

Lusk knew two things—Wall Street and the theater, and he therefore jumped at a topic of which he could speak with authority.

Fay smiled and shook her head. "That's a funny question for a man to ask a girl whom he's just met."

As a matter of fact, I have thought of it just as I've thought of a lot of other things that I might do when I wanted to get away from Pleasantville." And then as if from a civil desire to say something, rather than from any real curiosity, "Is it hard to get on the stage?"

"Hard to get on the stage!" Lusk repeated, and anxious to appear important in the eyes of the pretty girl at his side, laughed at the very thought. "Hard for a girl with your looks; not much, it isn't hard! I could get you a job to-morrow as a show-girl at twenty-five or thirty a week."

Miss Clayton pursed her lips, crinkled her forehead, and regarded the broker with a new and amused interest.

"Could you really?"

"Sure, I could. I know all the managers, know 'em well, and once in a while I take a little flier in a show myself. Better come on in—the acting's fine."

But the girl, with an evident desire to end this particular topic of conversation, smilingly shook her head. "I'm afraid not; I think I'd better stick to Pleasantville and the home folk."

The president's speech was very short, and coming to an abrupt end, Fielding stepped forward to receive

the prize. The women clapped their gloved hands, and the men who had lost to him gave three rousing cheers, and then in a spirit of revenge called loudly on the winner for a speech. Lusk turned to speak to Miss Clayton but there was something in her look that checked him, and with a grim smile of understanding, he turned away again. Her eyes were fixed on the winner, as were those of all of the little crowd on the lawn. At the moment Porter Fielding was a sight to attract the undivided attention of any woman. Very tall, hatless, his arms and throat bared, holding his golf-bag in one hand and the cup in the other, his well-poised head held high, he stood smiling back at the friendly smiling faces about him. Perhaps from a spirit of sheer admiration for the kind of manly beauty that he so woefully lacked, or perhaps to make quite sure of his supposition, Lusk once more turned to his companion.

"Good-looking boy, eh?" he asked, smiling broadly. He saw the girl's face flush and her hands tighten suddenly about the handle of her parasol. With her eyes still fixed on Fielding, she answered the broker in an almost inaudible whisper.

"Good-looking? Why, I think Porter is wonderful. Quite wonderful, don't you?"

Lusk looked down at his own carefully creased flannels, his spotless white felt shoes, and brushed a fleck of thread from his double-breasted blue serge coat. Then he smiled at his own conspicuous neatness and at the thought of how curiously emotional women were at times. But this humorous train of thought was suddenly interrupted by Miss Clayton, who was speaking to him again and with much spirit.

"Are you smiling at me, Mr. Lusk," she asked, "or rather at something I said? Because if you are, I think you're extremely rude."

For a moment he stared at the girl in open-eyed wonder, and his thin putty face turned scarlet. His confusion, however, was short-lived.

"I wasn't laughing at you or your remark," he said, grinning up at her cheerfully.

"No," she said; "what then?"

Lusk grew suddenly serious, and he looked her evenly in the eyes. "I was thinking," he said, "what a little part masculine beauty has always played in the history of the world. Female beauty, yes, but good looks in a man don't count—never have, never will count."

The broker half closed his eyes as if in earnest

thought. "Bonds count, and stocks, that is, good stocks count, and first mortgages count, and the best of all is cash. And some day, Miss Clayton, you will say that I am right, or if you don't then I don't know women."

The crowd about the table had broken up into little groups, and Fielding was walking across the lawn with a girl, tall, very fair and rather pretty, but she would have been conspicuous anywhere for the very good-looking clothes she wore. He was showing her the engraving on the cup, and they were laughing and both of them seemed to be very pleased and happy over his success. For a few moments as they strolled slowly toward the hotel, Fay Clayton followed them with her eyes. Then she turned back to Lusk.

"I'm afraid Porter agrees with you, Mr. Lusk," she said, "even if I do not."

The broker smiled knowingly and wagged his head.

"You mean the blond lady Fielding is talking to is rich?"

"Doesn't she look it? You don't wear all-lace

dresses like that when you're poor, not much you don't."

"And look at the pearls!" sighed Lusk. "Who is she?"

"Wilmerding—Blanche Wilmerding. They have a cottage down here on the beach. Her father is a banker or something like that in New York."

"Oi, oi!" exclaimed Lusk. "I know, David Wilmerding, the head of Wilmerding & Wilson. That old man's got money he hasn't spent."

Fay turned to Lusk and held out her hand.

"Good-by," she said, "I must be going home now. It's getting quite late, and they'll be waiting supper for me."

But Lusk insisted on walking home with her, and in spite of her protests refused to take no for an answer. They stopped at the drug store in the village, and at great risk to his own digestion, he made her drink soda-water with him, and afterward presented her with the largest box of candy the store contained. He would have liked to show her some further and more expensive attentions, but there was nothing else in the shop that he could well offer her. During the remainder of the walk, Fay continued to laugh at his jokes and smile at the more or

less interesting stories of his life in New York, but Lusk was sufficiently clever to know that the girl at heart fancied neither him nor his stories.

He left her at the gate of the Claytons' cottage and slowly retraced his steps to the Holt House. The superlative animal beauty of the girl, the apparent extreme poverty of the people who had adopted her, and her complete indifference to his own imagined importance had confused and annoyed the little broker considerably. Her exact position, too, seemed something of a contradiction and hard to place. Apparently she knew most of the women who belonged to the summer colony and all of the men, but even in the short time he had known her, the observant Lusk could see that at least the women did not treat her quite as one of themselves. For a moment he forgot his business cares and his friends in town and thought only of the girl with the red hair and scarlet lips and big blue eyes which seemed always to be laughing at but never with him. He had intended going to Long Branch after supper to call on some friends who had a cottage there, but at the last moment he changed his mind and followed a crowd of young people from the Holt House, who were on their way to a dance at one of

the hotels on the beach, and where he believed he would be most likely to find her.

From the dark piazza he saw her in the ballroom with Fielding. It was a warm night and her face was flushed with the heat. Her big blue eyes shone with pleasure and the excitement of the dance, and her wonderful red hair fell in crisp curls over her damp forehead and neck. She wore a simple lingerie dress, which was in striking contrast to many of the gowns worn by the other dancers, but the beauty of her face and tall lithe figure made her easily the most conspicuous woman in the room. From his point of vantage in the shadows of the veranda Lusk looked at Fay's cheap simple frock and her black cotton stockings, and smiled at the thought of how much more wonderful she would look in the kind of evening dresses that were worn by the women he knew in New York. He would have liked to ask her to dance, but in his constant quest for gold this was, to his present sorrow, one of the many social accomplishments which he had neglected entirely.

Once during the evening, while walking with Fielding Fay met him on the porch, and of her own initiative stopped and chatted with him. After

she had left him, Lusk dropped into a deep wicker chair and sat staring out at the black endless sea and the long narrow silver crescents of foamy breakers running up the flat gray beach. The whole place seemed filled with her presence. Her joyous laugh continued to ring in his ears, and he could still feel the grasp of her strong damp hand in his. For a long time he sat thus, unconscious of the music or of the chatter of the people about him. Then suddenly realizing his lonely position, he shrugged his narrow shoulders, and pulling himself slowly out of the depths of the chair, lighted a cigar, and started to walk back to the Holt House.

The morning following he went early to the bathing-grounds and patiently waited for her coming. At last he saw her walking from the bath-houses toward the sea, her black bathing suit silhouetted against the white glaring sand. When she had neared the water's edge, Fay threw herself at full length on the beach, and the men who were with her gathered about in a little circle. Lusk made a half-hearted move to join them, and then there came to him a sudden realization that he was not wanted, and he fell back into his former position. With envious eyes he looked at the broad shoulders and

athletic figures of the men in their bathing suits seated about her, and with envious ears he listened to snatches of their talk, and their free careless laughter. It was only for one brief moment that he decided that he would hire a suit and follow them into the surf, and then he thought of what a sorry figure he would cut alongside of her big brawny friends, and dismissed the idea as absurd. For more than an hour he watched Fay and her admirers swim and dive and plunge about in the breakers, race up and down the hard smooth beach, and from sheer exhaustion throw themselves on the hot sand. Once, from the water, she recognized him and waved to him to join them, but in answer Lusk only smiled feebly and shook his head.

It was after the bath was over, and she was dressed again and on her way to join her friends who were waiting for her, that Fay took pity on Lusk's loneliness and spoke to him again. She came up from behind where he sat and noiselessly dropped to the soft sand at his side. He looked about suddenly and saw her pretty face aglow from the bath and the hard exercise, and the great masses of red hair, hanging loosely about her shoulders, and reaching far below her waist. For a moment he gazed

in frank wonder at her splendid beauty and wonderful physical condition and with much difficulty tried to utter some words of welcome.

"You see," Fay laughed, "I had to come to *you*. I don't think you like me at all, Mr. Lusk."

The broker blushed and stammered a few unintelligible words of protest.

"You never asked me to dance last night," Fay ran on, "and you've kept away from me all this morning. Now all these other men dance and bathe with me and hang around until I'm tired of the sight of them."

Lusk no longer blushed, and the power of speech had once more come back to him.

"I can't dance," he said, "and I can't swim, but last night and to-day I haven't taken my eyes off of you. Miss Clayton, so help me, you're the most beautiful woman I ever saw!"

Fay looked into Lusk's serious blinking eyes, and laughed aloud.

"That's the most sincere and heartfelt compliment I ever had paid me. I wish you'd tell me things like that often, Mr. Lusk. You see you're a regular man, and it means so much more than the kind of fluff these kids talk."

Fay pulled herself to her knees and held out her hand to him. "Good-by," she said, "and don't get up, please."

"You *must* leave me so soon?" he begged.

"Must. But don't you neglect me after this. I want to hear all about your gay life in New York and on Wall Street, and your friends on the stage."

Lusk was standing now, and when he had raised the girl to her feet, looked her squarely in the eyes.

"I'm going to put you there," he said, smiling.

"Where," Fay asked, "on the stage?"

"That's it. I'm going to make a great actress of you."

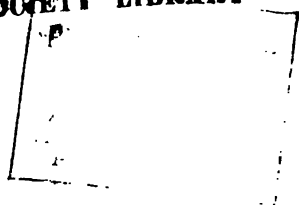
"All right, Mr. Lusk. I'll bet you don't."

With a farewell smile and a wave of her hand she ran away to join her friends, and once more Lusk was left alone. As he walked slowly back to the hotel to his midday dinner, his thoughts were all of the last bantering words that Fay Clayton had spoken to him, and the longer he thought of them the more the new idea she had planted in his mind pleased and interested him. On the afternoon previous, when he had first spoken to her of the stage as a profession, he had done so because it was one of the very few subjects, apart from his business, that



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he really knew and on which he could talk glibly and amusingly to women. But now the idea had suddenly become a matter of real consideration and fraught with the most interesting possibilities. His hands clasped behind his back, his beady eyes smiling under lowered brows, he walked slowly along the country road, carefully reviewing the situation from its many and varied angles.

Down there on the beach was a young woman of unusual beauty, and apparently brimming over with health, and the joy of living. Had the girl's circumstances been other than they were, he would have passed on with a regretful but philosophic sigh. Blanche Wilmerding, for instance, the daughter of old David Wilmerding, had no place in his scheme of life. Lusk knew that the firm of Lusk Brothers was not the kind of firm with which the old conservative house of Wilmerding & Wilson would deal, that is, if it could possibly be avoided, and he also knew that the doors of Wilmerding's house in New York or of his villa on the beach at Pleasantville would never be open to him.

But the case of Fay Clayton was altogether different. She was a girl without means or any defined position, living in almost poverty as the

adopted daughter of simple fisher-folk. He argued to himself that a girl in so anomalous a position must of necessity rebel against its hardships, and would willingly free herself from the slight bonds that held her—that is, she would if the inducements to break the bonds could be made sufficiently attractive. He knew that even Fay Clayton herself, notwithstanding her lack of worldly knowledge, must appreciate how few were the roads of escape open to a woman situated as she was. And of all these roads, Lusk knew, from his own experience, that the stage would, in nine cases out of ten, prove the greatest lure to a girl of Fay's spirits, and to her love of a life of action and one that was entirely free from restraint. To be sure she had laughed at his mere suggestion of going on the stage, but when he had had the opportunity to speak of the great possibilities of the profession, the immense returns in fame and fortune that awaited the successful actress, he was quite sure that he could reach something deeper in Fay than her simple love of excitement. It was through this finer bigger feeling of ambition that he hoped to break down any real prejudices the girl might have against the stage as a profession.

Max Lusk was without tact, or mental or moral cultivation, but he had an indomitable, almost brutal will, and when he wanted anything in this world he wanted it very badly, and the greater the obstacles thrown in his way, the greater the pleasure to took in fighting for the prize. He was a man of quick thought and quick action, and in addition to this he believed Fay Clayton to be the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. Between the time he left her at the bathing-grounds and his return to the hotel, he had carefully arranged his plan of action. It was out of the question to imagine that she would go to New York alone and accept his personal protection, or permit him to assist her financially during her career as an embryo actress. The key to the situation—at least so Lusk believed—lay in Porter Fielding. Even in the two days the broker had known Fay she had left no reasonable doubt as to her devotion and admiration for him. She was a girl whose emotions lay very near the surface, and she made no effort to conceal her feelings for Fielding to any one, even to a man whom she knew so slightly as Lusk.

Where Fielding went it would probably be easy to get Fay to follow. Therefore, the first move

was to get Fielding to New York, and after all Lusk had seen and learned that day, the task did not seem difficult. Fielding was without work, which the broker could offer him, and in the same town, too, where the rich Miss Wilmerding lived. Lusk knew that the latter coincidence might mean little or nothing, but he did know that good positions in brokers' offices in New York were exceedingly rare and not to be refused by boys from the country. He also appreciated, even from his short acquaintance, that with all his good looks and his charming courtesy of manner, Porter Fielding was a rather weak soul, and probably easily led. Down here in the country, in the open, on the golf links, he knew that he had no chance against this young good-looking athlete. But let the boy come to New York, and then Fay Clayton could compare them and the extent of their power—not in the sunshine, but under the searching white lights and the pink candle-shades of the Broadway restaurants where strength and good looks in men counted not at all; back in town, that is, the town that Lusk knew, a tainted and unreal land, where only money and automobiles and gorgeous apartments count, and where girls learn so easily and quickly the love of beautiful clothes and

wonderful jewels, and acquire the passion to have better clothes and more wonderful jewels than any other woman.

During the long afternoon Lusk had completed his plans, and after supper was over he looked up Fielding and asked him to walk with him to the river. For half an hour they sat on a bench smoking Lusk's best cigars. Before them the blue waters of the Natasqua River danced and sparkled in the last rays of the dying sun, and the fresh green grass and the spring wild flowers grew all about them. It was in this setting of rippling water and fragrant growing things that Lusk protested his admiration for Fielding and made his offer—the offer that was meant only to bring Fay Clayton to New York, —to the big town where the bright lights would blind her to the physical deficiencies and yet throw into a brilliant relief the great financial resources of Max Lusk.

It was but natural that Fielding should at once realize the advantage of this opportunity that the broker offered him. It meant work at once, living wages for the present, and for the future—at least so Lusk assured him—splendid possibilities of great wealth and the power that only wealth brings. He

was also conscious of the additional fact, although neither he nor Lusk made mention of it, that he was to live permanently in New York where he already had many friends, chief among whom were David Wilmerding and his daughter. That he would have to give up the summer months in the country meant little to Fielding, for his life at Pleasantville had already become irksome to him. And besides, Lusk had promised that they should come down together every Saturday morning to spend the week-end at the Holt House.

From the moment that Lusk had first made a definite proposition, Fielding knew that he would accept it, but taking himself rather seriously as a man of affairs, he deemed it to his advantage not to appear too eager. When the broker had finished his carefully worded offer, and recited the many advantages that would accrue from it, there was a long silence, during which Lusk cast occasional furtive glances at Fielding, who, with his broad shoulders resting against the bench, his arms folded, looked steadfastly at the deep blue waters of the little river.

"It would be hard to give up all this," he said at last. "I missed it terribly that year I was working in Jersey City."

Lusk smiled and twisted his cigar slowly between his lips.

"I suppose so. I suppose it was hard, but Jersey City isn't New York. You won't find the Natasqua River there, but, my boy, so much to make up for it, believe me. I admire your love for the country, and that's the very reason I want you in the office. City-bred boys are no use—they're born tired, but the boy from the country is fresh and strong and ambitious. Look over the men who have made fortunes in New York, and see how many were born New Yorkers. Not many, I can tell you. Besides, why should you stay here? You say you are all alone in the world. Why waste your time on golf and teaching a lot of kids in a village schoolhouse? Get out into the big puddle and splash about a bit, and watch the sharks swallow the minnies and look out that you're a shark, and not a minnie."

Fielding got up, and facing the broker, held out his hand.

"All right," he said, "I'll go you."

"Good for you!" Lusk cried. "I've a flask in my bag up at the house. Let's seal the bargain with a drink."

But Fielding begged off. "A little later I will,

but if you'll excuse me I think I'll finish my cigar down here. I want to think it over."

"Of course, of course, you do," Lusk said sympathetically. "Very natural of you, but don't get too sentimental over leaving the old place. Don't forget you'll be running down every Saturday and in a sixty-horse-power car just like a regular broker should. So long—see you at the house later."

Lusk slowly started on his way back to the hotel, but when he had reached the first turning in the road he stopped in the shadow of a clump of trees where, unobserved, he could watch Fielding. With a knowing smile he saw the young man look over his shoulder down the road Lusk had just taken, and then spring to his feet and hurry away along a path that would lead him through the woods and eventually to Fay Clayton's home.

"I thought so," Lusk mumbled, and started again on his way to the hotel. "But I won my first trick, anyhow. That boy a shark in the big puddle! They'll eat him alive."

Fay saw Fielding first when he was still far down the road and waved her hand, and then she and Margaret hurried down the path to meet him at the gate.

Fielding's face was smiling with happiness, and as he held out both hands to the girls, he fairly shouted his good news so that the Claytons, sitting on the porch of the little cottage, might hear of it at the same time as the others.

"Congratulate me, everybody," he cried; "I've got a job in New York."

Porter sat on the porch steps, and the others gathered about and constantly interrupted his story with exclamations of surprise and pleasure. Old Clayton rocked slowly up and down in his favorite chair, stroked his white stubble beard, and took his pipe out of his mouth long enough to say, "Well done, my boy, you deserve the honor."

Mrs. Clayton brushed back her hair, and putting on her spectacles, regarded him with a lingering look of pride, worthy of his own mother, who could never share in her boy's prosperity. Margaret slapped him violently on his broad shoulders, but Fay remained quiet until the story was quite finished, and then silently her hand stole out, and placing it over his, she gently pressed it. And then as a great treat and an unusual dissipation, Mr. Clayton got out a bottle of rye whisky and two glasses, and he and Fielding drank to the health of the "New

King of Wall Street". Margaret and Mrs. Clayton continued to bombard him with endless questions, pertinent and impertinent, about his plans, but Fay remained almost silent, wondering what kind of a man was this Lusk who in two short days had taken such an interest in an unknown boy and girl in a little Jersey village. When it came time for Porter to return to the hotel, she walked with him a short distance down the road that they had traveled so often and so many years together. When they had reached the path that led through the woods to the hotel, Fay stopped and held out both her hands to him.

"If you are to go so soon," she said, "perhaps we had better make this our good-by. We mayn't have another chance. If—"

"Many, I hope," Fielding interrupted her.

"I hope so, too, Porter," she went on, "but if we shouldn't I want to tell you how very proud I am of you and how proud I know that I'm always going to be of you. You see, Porter, you've been pretty much everything to me—all of my life, and so I'm going to miss you terribly, even if you do come back to see me on Saturdays. I suppose it's because neither of us had any real people of our

own that we were brought so close together, and that has made us understand each other so well."

She took her hands from his and laid them on his shoulders and looked up at him with dimmed eyes.

"Good-by, Fay, dear," he said.

"Good-by to you," she whispered; "and always for my sake be a good boy and a fine one, too, Porter, won't you? And here's good luck to you, and God bless you."

He took her pretty tear-stained face between his strong hands and kissed her on the broad clear forehead, but the next moment she had slipped from him and with lowered head was hurrying back to the cottage.

CHAPTER II

A FEW days later Porter Fielding had settled down as a clerk in the offices of Lusk Brothers. It was understood that he was there to learn the business, and his duties were far from onerous. Various young men at various times had been given clerkships in these same big mahogany and mirrored offices for various and often unknown causes, and therefore the members of the firm and their employees not only did not question his presence, but did their best to make it pleasant for the newcomer.

It was at the advice of one of his fellow-clerks that Fielding took a small furnished apartment in preference to going to a boarding-house. There were several restaurants in the neighborhood where he could eat fairly well at small expense, but there was little temptation to linger over his meals and, therefore, his days and nights were practically divided between the office and his apartment. He knew the city but slightly, and in addition to this, his present salary did not permit of many of the

town's pleasures. His days at the office were full enough, and it was only during the late afternoon and the long evenings after dinner that he had time to think of the lazy days at Pleasantville and to sometimes wish for a game of golf or a plunge in the surf or a sail with Fay or Blanche Wilmerding on the little river.

But even if he did occasionally feel the loneliness of a great city, and suffer from a real feeling of homesickness, he knew that he was only serving the apprenticeship that all young men without means must serve, and in his heart he was glad and grateful for the opportunity to get once more into action. Surrounded as he was at the office by men who could afford to indulge their every whim, he made light of his present simple life, was confident that it was but temporary, and with such good friends back of him did not doubt for one moment that money and social success were almost within his grasp. And even if his present rather meager salary to a great extent did narrow his life in town, he had always before him the prospect of the week-end trip with Lusk to his old home.

It was on the second of these visits to Pleasantville when Lusk first suggested to Fielding the idea

that Fay Clayton should come to New York and look for employment on the stage or elsewhere. At the time they were flying along the Shore Road in the broker's car. The sky was a wonderful turquoise blue, the road was well oiled, the air was balmy with the odor of the pine forests, the cushions of the car were deep and luxurious—it was in all ways the moment to consider the happiness of those less fortunate than themselves.

“It's a pity,” Lusk sighed. “I tell you it's a real pity that that girl, Fay Clayton, should waste her life in a little country town. Just think of the women who have succeeded on the stage and in business in New York with not half her beauty and ability. I tell you, Porter, it's a crime.”

The idea was entirely new to Fielding, and for some minutes he sat in silence, looking out on the flying landscape. Fay had meant a great deal to him the better part of his life, much more than any one else, but he had always pictured her as part of his life at Pleasantville. He had that affection for her that a man can only have for the woman he has known as a little girl, has gone to school with, has played with and fought for, and seen grow and develop from a slip of a freckled child into a half

grown girl and then into a woman, and in this case, a wonderfully beautiful woman.

During a long talk he had had with Fay subsequent to the night when he had first told her that he was going to New York, they had planned that, as soon as he was settled, she and her sister Margaret would come to pay him a long visit. The idea that she would ever consider coming there to live had never occurred to him, and for certain reasons of her own, Fay had not told him of how Lusk had urged her to let him procure a position for her on the stage. Exactly as to what her future was to be or how closely it was to be allied with his own, Fielding had given but little thought. When the question had come into his mind he had put it away with the excuse that they were both very young, and that there would be time enough to give the matter serious attention when he was comfortably settled in business. And in addition to this, it must be remembered that while he was blessed with great good looks and much admired by both men and women, especially women, Porter Fielding was at heart and in spirit just a little weak and a little selfish as well.

But now, on this bright June morning, Lusk had

put the question of Fay's future squarely before him, and as her best friend and lifelong adviser, he found it a most difficult question to answer.

"You see, Mr. Lusk," he said at last, "it's so hard for me to say. I appreciate your thoughtfulness in wanting to help her, and I know she would, too, but I don't think the idea of Fay's working ever occurred to either of us. Of course, the Claytons are only the plainest kind of people. He's a fisherman, and Mrs. Clayton has helped out by doing washing for the boarders during the summer; but they've always treated Fay as if she were a princess—that is, they did as far as they were able. The very romance and the mystery of her being washed ashore, and the fact that she never even knew her own name, have made them treat her better even than they have their own child. They have always believed that she came of people of quality, and whether she did or not, they have regarded her as something to be looked up to, and much better than themselves. Their belief in this idea has been so real that they have made the other people in the village believe it, and, to be quite frank, I think the girl believes it, too. Of course I have thought that Fay might leave the Claytons and Pleasantville some day when she was older,

but it would be because she married—never to go on the stage or to work in an office. I think if she did either it would kill the poor old Claytons.”

Lusk gazed gloomily at the chauffeur's back, and sank deeper into the yielding cushions of the car. For the moment he was greatly discouraged at Fielding's views, because he knew that the young man's words would have much if not everything to do with the girl's final decision.

“Well, you know best, I suppose,” he said, slowly shaking his head, “but it seems an awful wasted life to me for a girl like that. Think how proud you would all be if she went on the stage and made good, just as you're going to make good on the Street. To be a famous actress would surely be better than spending her days in a Jersey village. I know it's all right now in the good old summer-time, but consider those winter nights! Huh, it's awful just to think of it!”

Lusk pulled himself up to the edge of the seat and his narrow little body fairly shivered at the very idea.

“I know what you mean,” Fielding said. “It's pretty hard during the winter months, especially for a girl with Fay's spirits. And then she loves to be

going all the time. The only fun she gets is skating and tramping through the pines. Most of her time Fay spends visiting the old sick people in the village."

"Awful," Lusk signed, "awful! Just think it over, Porter. Take your time and try to see both sides. Besides, imagine what fun it would be for you to have her in town and to be able to take her about and show her the sights. I know just the place to give her a start. A friend of mine, Isador Harberg, has a big interest in a musical show that opens in New York in August, and they expect to keep it in town all winter. Even if they should go on the road, I could take Fay out and put her in something else. Harberg says they don't begin rehearsals before the first of July, so you see if you told her now she would have plenty of time to think it over."

Fielding nodded.

"All right," he said. "I may be wrong. I'll speak to her about it, anyhow, and then you can have a talk with her afterward."

For a long time after this the two men sat silent while the car purred on its way over the hard smooth roads. Curled up in the corner, his hands clasped about his knees, Lusk smiled at the excess of his own

enthusiasm. This love of gaining his own ends had always been an obsession with him, and it was this same indomitable will that had carried him to his present success in business. The idea of taking this country beauty to New York and dolling her up in fine plumage had at first appealed to him as an amusing idea, certainly worth the giving of a small position in his office to Porter Fielding. Now that there seemed to be some possibility of opposition on the part of Fielding himself and the kindly folk who had adopted her, the fight seemed just so much more worth the while.

Like most of his class, Max Lusk was fond of the envy of the people of his own world of boughten pleasures. He saw himself leading this unknown girl with the beautiful color and the wonderful red hair down the aisles of the big restaurants. She would be better dressed than any woman in the place, and the men and women sitting at the tables would gasp with wonder at her beauty and want to know where Lusk had discovered her. He would take her to the theater and sit alone with her in a stage-box, so that all the audience, as well as his friends on the stage, could see his latest conquest. And later, when she herself appeared on the stage,

more beautiful and more wonderful than any of the other women there, then he would sit down in front, and her smiles would be for Max Lusk only, and he would be the envy of all of the other men in the theater. He would send her flowers, big bunches of orchids, to be worn at her corsage, or beauty roses with very long stems, which she would carry in her arms, and every night one of his automobiles would meet her at the stage door and whisk her off to supper with him. The little broker smiled complacently at these pictures of his great bounty to the girl, and in every picture he saw Max Lusk shining in the reflected glory of her brilliant success.

The idea of Fay coming to New York filled Fielding's mind to the exclusion of every other thought. The crucial moment of the girl's life was at hand, and he believed that he alone would decide the course which she would eventually pursue. After twenty years of care and devotion and slaving, he knew that the Claytons' wishes in the matter would avail not at all against the strong independent will of their adopted child. He knew that he and he alone had heretofore been able to control her. From her affection for him, or an absurd belief in his judg-

ment and common sense, she had never failed to follow his advice, but the present situation was something much bigger than either of them had ever faced before. For the first time Fielding recognized the narrow limitations of his own worldly wisdom, and that he was facing a condition that he was wholly inadequate to combat. His knowledge of New York and the life which Lusk had offered as an alternative to Fay's uneventful existence in the country was absolutely nil, and he was conscious that his opinions and advice would have no more real value than so many empty words. He had set himself a task which he now regarded with the keenest regret, but he had given his word to Lusk, and at present the latter stood sponsor for every hope of the fulfilling of Fielding's own ambitions.

It was at Lusk's suggestion that they stopped at the Clayton cottage before going to the hotel, and without telling Fay why he wished to talk to her, Fielding arranged to meet her late that afternoon at the landing where she kept her sailboat.

He found her waiting for him, sitting in the stern of the boat, the sail up and everything ready. Once away from the pier, he took a seat just across from

where she sat and in silence they watched the breeze fill the little sail and heard the gentle lapping of the tiny waves as they were carried toward the opposite shore of the river.

"Isn't it good," she said at last, "to be alone, just you and I, drifting along in the same old lazy way? Tell me, Porter, has it helped, or has New York spoiled you for this sort of thing?"

He looked at her bared throat, at the brown strong arms and hands grasping the tiller, at the strands of the wonderful hair broken loose and blown across her pretty sunburned face. As she sat there smiling at him with her lips and eyes, it seemed as if she were an essential part of the rippling water, the cloudless, deep blue sky and the distant green banks and sandy pebbled beach. It did not seem quite possible to imagine her a part of any other scene just then.

"Has it helped?" he repeated. "Has it helped? I don't believe I ever cared for the old place before as I do at this moment. That's what makes it so hard to say what I've got to say to you, Fay."

"Is it as bad as that?" she laughed. "Go ahead, Porter; I'll make it as easy as I can for you."

"On our way down here," he began, "Lusk and I had a long talk about you. He thinks you are wasting your life at Pleasantville. Wants you to go to New York and make a career for yourself."

The smile suddenly faded from the girl's face.

"Did Mr. Lusk tell you how I was to make a career?"

"Yes; he says he has a chance for you to go on the stage."

"And what did you say?"

Fielding looked up at Fay's serious eyes and then beyond to the white curving beach and the green banks.

"I only said that I would tell you. I thought it best that I should speak to you first. That's about all I could say, except talking over your position here and how you were situated with the Claytons. But, of course, he knew all that as well as I did."

There was a lull in the breeze, and for a moment Fay turned her eyes to the gently flapping sail and then back to Fielding.

"Would you like me to go, Porter?" she asked.

Fielding looked at her with frank surprise.

"Why, I don't know, Fay. It never really oc-

curred to me that you would give the idea a serious thought. You know what it would mean to those two old people. If they thought that you—”

“I know that, Porter,” she interrupted, “I understand all that, but I’m not thinking of them now. The time has come when I have to think of myself—every man and every woman has to come to it sooner or later. Much as I love them, and I do really love them, Porter, I know that they can only live for a few years, and then what is going to become of me? It might be too late for me to make a start then.”

“And Margaret?” he asked.

“The chances are,” Fay hurried on, “that Margaret will marry some one in Pleasantville, and she will probably be very contented and very happy. I wish I could be, but I can’t. Tom Nagle, the butcher’s boy, asked me to marry him last spring, and Billy Carter, who works over at the hardware shop, tried his best to propose two or three times, but I can’t marry Tom Nagle or Billy Carter and spend the rest of my days in Pleasantville. I just couldn’t do it. You’re the only thing that kept me alive here, and now you’ve gone away.”

Fielding looked at her and nodded.

"I understand, of course," he said. "I suppose you've been thinking of this for some time."

"No, only for the last two weeks. Lusk suggested the idea to me as a joke, and it sort of appealed to me as a way out of my troubles. Then you went away, and I'll tell you honestly, Porter, I've missed you terribly."

Fielding laid his hand gently over Fay's that rested on the tiller. The breeze died away, and the boat was only drifting.

"Tell me, Fay," he said, "what are your real troubles?"

The girl looked up at him and then across the river to the great scarlet disk of fire slowly disappearing behind the high green banks.

"Troubles," she repeated, "just the same old troubles. It's not so easy for you to understand, because, even if they are gone, you had a father once and a mother and a certain defined position in the world. I have nothing. I was cast up on the beach down there by the Twin Dunes, with a lot of wreckage. That was the day of my birth, you might say. Perhaps my mother was a princess, as Mother Clayton and some of these folk in the village like to believe she was, and perhaps she wasn't. What kind

of people she and my father were, we can only judge by their daughter, and sometimes, God help me, Porter, I almost believe that they were not very good people."

Fielding drew himself up very straight and looked her squarely in the eyes.

"There are times, Fay," he said, "when I can't understand you—times when I don't know what you mean."

There was a puff of wind, and Fay put the boat about and with a free sail pointed toward the landing.

"No," she said with a little sigh and an effort to smile, "I know that. I know that you don't understand me sometimes, Porter. It would be very difficult for any man to understand. Because if you had no family or position you could go out and fight for one, but it's not so easy for a girl to do that. The men down here are all right because they think I'm pretty, I suppose, but the women say 'Who is she?' and the answer is that I'm a foundling and was adopted by some kind natives. They might give me the benefit of the doubt and take it for granted that my people were at least nice decent people, but they don't. They treat me as if I were a

freak or something worse. I tell you, Porter, women aren't naturally kind to other women. Why, there isn't a day that I go to the links or the hotel or to a dance on Saturday nights that I don't have to be on my guard every minute. The women speak to me, but they never forget that the only mother I have does their washing for them. If I were an out-and-out native it would be better, but I'm not. I'm something that floated in on a wreck—a derelict.

"Day after day I've gone down to the Twin Dunes, and do you think that ever for one moment, when I've looked at the place where they found me that night, that I was thankful? Not once, Porter. I'd sit there and look at the waves, and all they ever seemed to say to me was that line from Markheim: 'If my life be an ill thing, I can lay it down.' That's all they ever said to me, and they've pounded it into my head until I thought I'd go mad. One of these days I'll—"

"Don't say that, Fay," Fielding threw back at her. "I don't think that you're fair to yourself or to the women. You're naturally very sensitive."

"Sensitive," she repeated. "Of course I'm sensitive. If you had been treated as I have been by these good and carefully protected wives and daughters

you would be sensitive, too. The only thing I can do is to take the men away from them, and I like to think that I'm too much of a woman to stoop that low. I tell you, Porter, I'm tired of it. I'm tired of Pleasantville, and I'm tired of the people who come here, and I'm tired of their snubs, and the hypocrisy of their charity, and if Max Lusk or anybody else gives me a chance to get away and be somebody on my own, then I'm going to get away, and the quicker the better."

Fielding shrugged his shoulders. "All right, Fay," he said, "have it your own way. I wish I could advise you, but I know no more of the life that Lusk throws out to you than you do. It's up to you to decide."

When the girl spoke again it was almost in a whisper, and her voice, as well as her manner, was very tense and hard.

"I know that," she said; "I know it's up to me. It's been up to me ever since the night I was born down there on the beach, and now I'm going to take a chance to get out into the world and do something and be somebody. I know I oughtn't to leave these old people and Margaret, but I'm going to be selfish, Porter. All my life I've kept myself down. I've

been starved in this place and all the time something inside of me, that my mother put there, has been crying out for a chance in the big world. And now if it's come to me, so help me God, I'm going to take that chance."

For a few moments they sat in silence while the little boat drifted toward the end of the landing, but in that short time Fay's manner underwent a complete and wonderful change. She turned to Fielding once more, her old calm joyous self.

"Don't worry about me, Porter," she laughed. "You'll find that I'll come out all right, and don't you forget that I'm to see Lusk before he goes back."

That all-important interview, perhaps the most important in the life of Fay Clayton, took place the following morning on the beach in a little arbor built of pine boughs far from the bathers and the crowd of onlookers. For an hour she and Lusk sat alone, and this time it was the man who did the talking, and when Lusk was sufficiently interested he talked extremely well. His arguments throughout were prejudiced and unfair, but he was wise enough to speak only of the case of the girl who regards the stage in the light of an honorable and legitimate profession,

and ignores any outside means of adding to her income. He began his argument by admitting that a certain amount of hardship was necessary to the beginning of any career. Of this phase he spoke but a few words and then hurried on to tell at great length of the rewards that were sure to come with her success, and he did not fail to paint in vivid colors the advantages of any life that she might lead in the city as compared to her present dull existence in Pleasantville.

Lusk had a quick clever mind, and it was not difficult for him to answer the many questions she asked him or to make light of the obstacles she most feared. But, after all, it was not the adroitness of the broker's mind or his ready speech that finally induced the girl to say that she would in all probability accept his offer. Although unconscious of the fact, the broker had really won his first battle with Fay the day before when Fielding had told her that Lusk had found an opening for her on the stage and a chance to get away from Pleasantville. Whatever might be the hardships of this new life, at least to Fay it meant independence and complete freedom from the narrow views and the narrow life of the kindly people who had brought her up. It meant,

too, that she would be near Porter Fielding, the one person in the world for whom she really cared, and besides all this, in the dim distance, she saw awaiting her the shimmering crown of fame as a reward for her hard work and her ambition and beauty and endless endeavor.

That night she gave the two men her definite answer and agreed to come to New York in time to begin rehearsals for the new play. It was arranged that on the all-important day, two weeks hence, she would go to town with Fielding and Lusk in the latter's automobile, but as she did not wish to tell the Claytons of her decision until the very last moment, it was further agreed that no one should speak of the matter, at least in Pleasantville. And although they all held to this agreement, nevertheless each of them, Fay and Fielding and Lusk, began characteristically to prepare for the girl's coming to New York.

On the Sunday evening before the morning of her departure, Fielding went over to the Clayton cottage to see that Fay was ready for the trip. As he strolled slowly through the little village and across the fields that led to her home, the place had never seemed quite so beautiful or quite so much like a home to

him before. For a moment he stopped at the gate and looked long at the little shingled cottage made beautiful by age and so many tender associations. It came to him fully for the first time just how much every stick and stone, every bush and every flowering plant in the little garden, meant to him, for in a way Fay's home had always been his home, too, and now, in his heart, he knew the end had come. She saw him from the window of her room and ran down the path to greet him.

"I knew you'd come," she said. "It just seemed as if you would have to come to-night."

She held out both her hands, and he took them in his, and when they had looked into each other's eyes they knew that they had but one thought.

"Have you a few moments to spare?" he asked.

"Yes," she said, "as many as you wish."

They walked to the edge of the garden, and with their arms resting on the paling fence, looked out in silence on the narrow dusty road and the green meadows and beyond to the pine forests. Through the upper branches they could see the pearl and pink lights of the dying day—the last day of their lazy, childish, happy dreams.

"Have you told them?" he asked.

"Yes," she said with a catch in her voice; "yes, I told them a little while ago."

"Was it very hard?"

"Yes, Porter, it was very hard. Margaret cried and upbraided me for not telling them before; but what was the use? I think Father Clayton took it hardest of all. I meant so much to him—and I suppose it sort of hurt his pride. He asked me if it was for good, and I said I thought that it was, and then he put his arms about me and kissed me and told me that whatever happened, and whether I succeeded or failed, that the home and he and mother would always be waiting for me."

"And your mother?" Fielding asked.

"No, mother didn't say anything. I suppose it was the idea of the stage that hurt. I guess, Porter, there's only one thing that a girl could tell her mother that would have hurt her worse."

"And she didn't say anything about your coming back home to visit, or if you wanted to come to stay?"

"No, Porter. She just sat by the window, rocking up and down, with her hands clasped, and staring up at the ceiling. I tell you I thought I'd go mad, and then father got down the Bible and read a chapter

about being saved from temptation. That's what they're afraid of, and that's what hurts me here in my heart. They ought to believe in me after more than twenty years; don't you think so, Porter?"

The girl suddenly dropped her face in her arms and broke into a series of long low sobs.

Fielding put out his hand and touched her gently on the shoulder.

"It'll all come right, Fay, dear," he said. "They're very old, and they don't know a great deal about the outside world, and then you must remember that you've been so very much in their lives. So very much—pretty much everything. I think perhaps I'd better go in and have a talk with them now."

Fay looked up sharply, her eyes filled with fear, and with both hands caught Fielding by the arm.

"Don't, please, don't do that," she begged, "not now, not to-night. They've got the idea that your going to New York has something to do with my going, too. Don't go in there, now, Porter, please, for my sake. I couldn't stand another scene to-night. I couldn't do it—I just couldn't."

"Of course, of course, Fay, dear," Fielding said, "I understand. A week or two from now when

they're used to the idea, I'll have a good long talk with them and explain what it really means for you to go to New York and all about your wonderful future."

The fear had gone from the girl as quickly as it had come, and putting out her hands she rested them on his shoulders and with her tear-stained eyes looked into his.

"Porter," she said, "there's something else. I want you to make me a promise."

Fielding could not trust himself to look into her face just then, and so he continued to stare beyond the meadows at the distant pines.

"It's granted now," he said. "You must know that."

"It's really not very much. But, whatever happens, I want you to promise that if I should ever ask you that you will bring me back here some day."

Fielding nodded, and they started slowly across the garden toward the house.

"Of course, Fay," he said, "but we are to come back many, many times together. This must always be our real home. It couldn't very well be otherwise—could it?"

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She pressed his hand hard in hers.

"I hope so," she whispered. "You don't know how very much I hope so, Porter, but we can't always tell. Can we, dear?"

CHAPTER III

ALL the plans for Fay Clayton's coming to New York had been made in advance by Max Lusk. Rather than have her go to a hotel or a regular boarding-house, he had arranged to have her live with an old friend, Mrs. Amelia Yorke, who had not only formerly been on the stage herself, but had a daughter who was a chorus girl and for this reason, as well as from her own personal inclinations, had always remained in close touch with the theater and its people. In many ways the arrangement seemed, at least for the moment, to be one of mutual benefit. On the one hand, Fay, while enjoying the home life of the Yorke flat, would have at the very outset of her stage life the expert knowledge of a theatrical family, and, on the other hand, the Yorkes being in a chronic state of bankruptcy, the ten dollars a week which Fay was to pay for her board and lodging would be of the greatest possible financial assistance to them. Indeed, beyond the the twenty dollars that Doris Yorke received every week as a member of

the Casino chorus, the family was quite without any visible means of support.

Mrs. Yorke was by the way of being a widow, although she personally had a most sincere, and probably correct belief in the theory that Mr. Yorke was still among the living. Several years previous and at one of those almost perpetual periods when the Yorkees were violently discussing a legal separation, a terrible catastrophe had visited the heart of New York's business district. Fire had broken out in an old building, the upper stories of which were occupied by a job printing concern. Almost without warning the massive presses had crashed through the intervening floors and crushed the life out of fifty unfortunate souls who were at lunch in a restaurant in the basement. It so happened that Mr. Yorke occasionally took his lunch here, but whether he was present on this tragic occasion was never really known. His body may have been among the fifty charred and unrecognizable remains taken from the cellar; or it may have been that he only wished it to appear so, and regarding the occasion as a marvelous opportunity to escape from Mrs. Yorke or possible years of alimony, had promptly flown to parts unknown. It was to the latter belief that Mrs. Yorke

always held, and the arrival of a telegram invariably sent her into a paroxysm of anxiety as to whether she was or was not a bona fide widow.

Although Mrs. Yorke was beyond dispute the strongest individual power, the real head of the household, at least in point of years, was Mr. Hooker, father of Mrs. Yorke. He was a patriarchal old gentleman with a self-fancied resemblance to Noah, a mild species of vanity he had carefully cultivated and to which he constantly referred in his occasional rambling conversation. Although known as Pop at the Yorke flat, and by the small shopkeepers in the neighborhood where the family dealt, he had formerly borne the much more distinguished title of The Great Mozark, the Magical Medical Man. For more than thirty years he had traveled through the Middle West at the head of his own medicine show, and there were still extant in that district rumors of his marvelous cures, and of the ample fortune that he had accumulated therefrom.

There were also well authenticated tales of a beautiful but unscrupulous young woman from Chicago who, having heard of the old man's savings, had joined the medicine show with the ostentatious purpose of singing coon ballads, but

with the real and more selfish intention of taking away his fortune. Exactly what did happen the Great Mozark himself never told, but it is a matter of history that one day the old man turned up at the Yorke flat quite penniless and had ever since remained its most permanent fixture. Dressed in a frock coat, a pair of trousers of a conspicuous plaid pattern (a remnant of his former greatness), a white shirt with a heavily starched bosom but no collar, he spent his days in a rocking-chair looking out of the window and smoking a huge meerschaum pipe. He spoke but seldom and then usually during the meals, when he whined in bitter complaint against the food that was set before him.

Another member of the household was Miss Angie Clubb, a niece of Mrs. Yorke and a pretty blond creature with a very pink and white coloring and what might be described as a plump Viennese figure. Miss Clubb was a very dull and pleasant soul, but with no apparent ambition in life except to wear good clothes, eat better food than she could possibly get at home, and avoid anything that suggested work or activity of any kind. At regular intervals she would accompany Doris Yorke to the various theatrical managers' offices in search of em-

ployment, but these visits had as yet never been attended with any practical results. Doris Yorke, the chorus girl, completed the family circle, and probably owing to the fact that she was its only wage-earner was, at least as far as the household itself was concerned, by far its most unpopular member. As Mrs. Yorke could not afford a servant it became the duty of Doris to clean the house, make the beds and assist her mother with the cooking. Combined with her stage work it was a most unhappy and irksome existence, but with the exception of a few months which she had spent on the road with traveling companies, it was the only life that she had ever known.

When it was announced that a boarder in the person of Fay Clayton was to join the family circle, it can not in truth be said that Doris received the news with any particular degree of enthusiasm. To her it meant only another room to clean, one more to cook for, and, in all probability, less to eat for herself. But somewhat to the consternation of Mrs. Yorke, and especially to Angie Clubb, Fay insisted from the outset on taking care of her own room, even helping in the kitchen and on making herself generally useful about the house.

In less than twenty-four hours after Lusk had in-

roduced her to the Yorke flat she had settled down as a full-fledged member of the family, and indeed her presence seemed to facilitate rather than to clog the machinery of the household. She was always laughing and eager to work for others, and except in the case of Doris, the desire to help any one to anything in the Yorke ménage was an unknown or certainly unpractised virtue. Even old Mr. Hooker, when Fay made her first appearance, had found time to stop rocking and smile at her benignly over the rims of his spectacles. And when she had left the room he crossed his arms, sighed dolorously and from the depths of his memory recalled a quotation which he repeated dully several times to the stiff lace curtains of the window.

“‘A woman clothed in sunshine—a woman clothed in sunshine.’”

Between Fay and Doris there at once sprang up a strong intimacy. Fay liked the tawny-haired little chorus girl because she was so honest and sincere, and later, when she really learned the strength of the girl's character, her liking developed into the most sincere affection and admiration. But to her great regret Fay soon discovered that Doris was

something of a freak of nature and that her admirable and altogether lovable traits were in nowise shared by the other members of her family. After her years of ease, if not of luxury, with the simple Claytons at Pleasantville there was much in the life of the Yorke family that did not appeal very strongly to the new boarder. Every member of the household was in chronic need of money and discussed but little else. Mrs. Yorke and Miss Clubb constantly deplored their lack of suitable raiment, and the old man was forever whining about the quality of the food and the lack of tobacco which, with a copy of a morning and evening newspaper, constituted his only needs. And then there was that prince of *bêtes noires*, the landlord, demanding his rent, which was always in arrears, and those two other monthly horrors, the gas and the telephone bills. The latter was the subject of the most violent discussions because it was regarded by every one, with the exception of Miss Clubb, as the most selfish and unnecessary of luxuries. She, however, contended with much spirit, and not without a considerable degree of truth, that if it were not for the telephone no one would ever ask her out to dinner.

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It was but a few days after Fay's arrival, and the family were seated about the table after the usual modest luncheon. Mrs. Yorke pushed her heavy body back into her chair, and having blown several rings of smoke from her cigarette at the mosquito-covered chandelier, once more renewed her campaign against the telephone.

"Mind you, Angie, dear," she said with a certain tone of mock humility in her deep sonorous voice, "I don't want to spoil your fun, and I know we live too far up-town for your gentlemen friends to call on you or even pay a messenger to bring you an invitation. The telephone was surely invented for gentlemen who are in unexpected and immediate need of a good-looking girl for dinner or a supper-party, but I ask you, Angie, dear, what good does it do the rest of us? Once in a great while somebody calls up Doris, but she usually gets her notes down-town at the theater. But where do Pop and I come in, is what I want to know? Now, if you ever brought anything home from your swell dinners and your gay supper-parties it would be all right, but you don't, Angie. You know you don't. Sometimes, maybe, a fan the head waiter gave you at the

restaurant, or a souvenir doll. But what good's a doll in a pink paper skirt or a cheap fan with a restaurant advertisement on it to me or Pop? You might bring us a bottle of wine once in a while."

Miss Clubb flushed and glared angrily at her aunt across the table. "I'm no chorus girl grafter," she complained. "My gentlemen friends ain't accustomed to give girls a quart to take home to their folks. They're not that kind."

Mrs. Yorke puffed up like a great pouter pigeon and stared fiercely into the girl's eyes. "That's right, Angie, you ain't no wine grafter. I can see that, unless it happens that you and your refined gentlemen friends drink it yourselves on the way home in the cab, but I notice you ain't above working your friends for a new hat, or a pair of gloves, and I suppose it was you who knit those scarlet silk stockings you brought home the other afternoon. You're so industrious with your needle, you are, Angie. I don't think."

Tears gathered in the pale blue eyes and coursed in two little rivulets down Angie's heavily powdered cheeks. Lacking a handkerchief, she pressed a much used napkin to her face and the flow of tears was temporarily stopped. With a few inarticulate

sounds of disgust old man Hooker pushed back his chair and retired to his seat at the window.

Miss Clubb turned her damp eyes to those of Fay, who was not yet immune to these family squabbles and was regarding her with a sympathetic interest.

"It's pretty hard, Miss Clayton," she said with a distinct tremor in her voice. "I tell you it's pretty hard to be put upon by your own aunt, especially when your folks are dead, and you haven't got no home of your own, and all just because you won't bring a quart or the cold leavings from a supper-party home to the flat. Heaven knows I've been tramping the streets and visiting managers no end looking for work."

Mrs. Yorke sniffed audibly and with a dexterous movement of her thumb and finger flipped her cigarette end into the empty hearth.

"It's a pity about you, Angie; it sure is a pity the way you wear yourself out looking for work! And those managers' stairs are so steep and the waiting-rooms that dusty!"

Once more Angie showed the preliminary signs of the flood of tears that seemed forever ready to overflow her pretty eyes. "It's not the stairs and the dirty offices that's the trouble," she sobbed;

"it's that gray cloth dress and the hat with the blue feathers. I've worn it in summer and winter until they're all sick of it. Even the office boys beat it now when they catch sight of those blue plumes."

Doris Yorke leaned her elbows on the table and rested her chin between her palms. "Why don't you try for this show Fay's in? If—"

"That's funny, kid," Mrs. Yorke interrupted, "that's what I call good cheap comedy. Why, Rosie Lamont's going with it, and she told me the other day that they had the greatest bunch of show-girls ever seen on Broadway. Angie'd have a great chance for a job with that crowd—not!"

Doris looked calmly at her mother's excited perspiring face and shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh, I don't know! They're not so much; just a lot of old established failures. I should think the managers would be glad to get a new face once in a while. I'll go in with you to see Morley to-morrow morning, Angie, that is, if you're game. It's a good engagement—a week or two on the road and then Broadway for a long run. Think it over."

Further conversation was interrupted by the ring of the telephone bell. Doris answered it, but announced that the call was for Angie. Before the

latter had reached the telephone the gloom that had filled the little dining-room had been dispelled and now there was an air of cheerful expectancy.

"Sure, I will," Angie cooed through the telephone. "I thought you'd forgot all about me. I'll be ready in ten minutes. Just ring the bell in the hallway and I'll come right down. By-by."

"Who is it?" gasped Mrs. Yorke, her round shining face fairly exuding hilarious excitement. Angie started on a run for her bedroom.

"It's a john I met at supper last week," she threw over her shoulder. "He's coming up with his car."

"Good, good for you, Angie!" Mrs. York called. "He ought to be good for the telephone bill, anyhow." She bustled out of the room in pursuit of the fortunate Angie, and Fay and Doris were left alone.

Doris went over to the window and looked out on the narrow court of dull yellow brick walls and rusty iron fire-escapes. For a moment she beat a tattoo with her knuckles on the soiled window-pane and then spoke without looking around. "I'm sorry," she said, "very sorry, Fay."

Fay looked up from her seat at the table in surprise.

"Sorry?" she repeated; "sorry about what? That Angie is going out for a ride?"

"No, about the row. But I suppose you had to get used to it sooner or later. It's always that way, fighting and quarreling and bickering over who'll pay for this and who'll pay for that, and how they'll divide my salary. Take my advice, and when you begin to get your wages don't loan 'em anything, because you'll never get it back."

Fay laughed. "Don't you worry about that," she said, "I'll need it all myself. I'm beginning to find out already what a lot it costs to live on in this town."

Doris turned and looked Fay evenly in the eyes.

"No, you don't, Fay. You'll never know till you're in debt. That's when you'll appreciate it. When the men you thought were your friends are chasing you like a lot of hungry wolves, and your own mother is begging you to ask money from a lot of college boys to pay the rent." She folded her arms over her flat chest and turned back toward the window. "Oh, God," she whispered, "how I hate it all! I tell you it's awful. The degradation of it and the everlasting cry of those two women in there for money, always money and at any price."

The girl suddenly put her arms before her on the window-frame and sobbed aloud. Fay went over to her and laid her hands gently on Doris' shoulders. "After all," she said, "she is your mother."

"I know," the girl sobbed softly; "I know, but sometimes it's so hard not to forget that. One of these days I'm afraid I'll tell her just what kind of a mother I think she has been to me, and then that would mean the end of the only home I've got."

The bell that connected with the street vestibule rang shrilly through the apartment, and from across the hallway they heard the door of Angie's bedroom closed with a slam, and the rustle of her dress as she hurried out on her way to keep her appointment.

"Don't forget the telephone bill," Mrs. Yorke called after her, "and if you only could get enough to pay that night dentist for fixing Pop's teeth! And, Angie, dear, there's always the rent."

Doris turned from the window, and as she looked at Fay, she tried to force a smile into her tear-stained eyes.

"Mother's right," she said, "there's always the rent."

It had never occurred to Fay that her life at the

Yorke flat was anything more than one of the unhappy steps she must take in order to reach the goal of a successful actress. Had she believed for one moment that her present unpleasant surroundings were to last for more than the briefest period she would have returned at once to the home that she believed was still open to her at Pleasantville.

During the few days that she had been with the Yorke family its members, except on the occasion of the outbreak concerning the telephone, had refrained from any of the usual exhibitions of open warfare, and had done their best to make it as comfortable and as pleasant as possible for the new boarder. But in spite of this momentary effort Fay was always conscious of the dull sordid life of the people among whom she had been thrown, their lack of any real interests, and with the exception of Doris, a total abhorrence for every kind of work, and a constant effort to hide the abject poverty in which they lived out their miserable useless existences. Added to these unhappy traits there was, especially on the part of Mrs. Yorke and Angie, the always present desire for amusement, however cheap and vulgar it might be, and a constant vigilance to seize any opportunity to extract anything

in the way of food or clothes or money from any one on whom they could lay their greedy hands.

During the week that intervened between her departure from Pleasantville and the day that her rehearsals were to begin, Fay spent most of her afternoons and all of her evenings with Porter Fielding. It was not only a welcome relief to her to get away from the Yorke flat and the family's troubles, but it was a great pleasure, as it had always been with Fay, to be alone with Porter. Now she was getting her first glimpses of New York through his eyes, and although he was almost as ignorant of the city and its ways as she was, Fay refused to see this and chose to regard him as a thoroughly knowing guide and mentor.

As is usual in July, the city was at its worst, the streets seemed all torn up and the buildings all torn down, or in a state of chaotic construction. The pavements were baked with the dry heat of a long summer, the air was lifeless, and the whole town foul with dirt and plaster dust. But the scorched city, and the unfortunate remnants of its perspiring people who could not get away, and who wandered slowly about gasping for breath, did not worry Fay and Porter at all. Their hearts were very

light and above all they had youth. Their strong healthy bodies had been filled for many months with the fresh pure air of the open country and besides that they were both secure in the belief that they were at the door-step of a wonderful new life which was to be crowded with happiness and crowned with great success. That the emoluments which were to be a natural accompaniment to this success were still far distant and that their present poverty confined their amusements to the most simple of pleasures, was, to their youthful spirits, of the least possible consequence.

In the late afternoons they rode on the Fifth Avenue omnibuses or took long leisurely walks through the Park, where they fed the squirrels and enjoyed innumerable trips in the swan-boats. Always at six o'clock they separated, and Fay returned to the Yorke flat to put on one of her best shirt-waists and a fresh duck skirt and otherwise prepare for the more formal pleasures of the evening. By seven, much to the envy of Mrs. Yorke and Angie, she was off again and on her way to join Porter at his rooms on West Thirty-first Street. It was a pretty little apartment that he had taken, very small and very cheap, but if the curtains and

the furniture of scarlet brocade were a trifle faded and frayed they had once been of the best and bore a distinct air of decayed aristocracy. There was a little square sitting-room with two windows, and an alcove bedroom with one window, and a tiny bathroom with no window at all. In fact the bathroom bore all the evidences of having been, in the days when the original owners occupied the entire house, either a closet or a clothes-press. The walls of the sitting-room were covered with a very ancient if correct example of a flowered white colonial paper, but to offset the general tone of cold severity Porter had tacked up innumerable photographs. These were of Fay, taken on the tennis-courts at Pleasantville, and in her bathing-suit on the beach; and of himself playing golf; and of both of them in a canoe, or posing on a lawn, or on a bench at the river's edge. For two young people, not too knowing or fastidious in their artistic tastes, but overflowing with the joy of living and a great affection for each other, it was a most cozy and cheerful little room, full of reminiscences of the happy past, and an excellent place to chat and dream foolish impossible dreams of a splendid future.

Their favorite dining place was Guffanti's, where

they had noodle soup and macaroni *au jus* and which they enjoyed out of all proportion to its seasonableness. They usually sat long over their coffee, while Porter smoked his cigar and talked of his day down-town at the office, or Fay discussed the Yorke family and their frantic efforts to escape a complete financial collapse. Twice they went to vaudeville performances and once to see *The Follies* at the New York Roof Garden, but on the other nights they had returned to Porter's rooms, which were cooler and proved a much less expensive form of entertainment than the theater.

Only twice had Fay seen Max Lusk since she had come to New York. Once he had called at the Yorke flat, where he had been received with open arms and a most flattering enthusiasm by the entire family. He came like a fairy prince in a huge canary yellow touring car, and which was greeted by the children of the neighborhood with as much acclaim as if it had been the golden band wagon of a circus parade. He also came laden with many gifts—a bottle of old rye for Mr. Hooker, a large tin box of cigarettes for Mrs. Yorke, white leather belts for Angie and Doris, and, as if by way of contrast to these practical offerings, a great bunch of roses for Fay. Hav-

ing distributed his gifts with a truly Santa Claus manner, he proceeded to make himself a most genial if somewhat boisterous guest. Acceding to Mrs. Yorke's urgent requests, he relieved himself of his coat, and accepting the largest chair, put his feet on another and proceeded with great relish to smoke one of his own good cigars, and cool his perspiring face with a palm-leaf fan.

"Nothing like a glimpse of family life," he said with a chuckle, "nothing like it after a hard hot day on the Street. I was just on my way to the Polo Grounds and thought I'd drop in to see how you were all getting on." He turned to Fay and his eyes fairly blinked at her cool perfect beauty. "Miss Clayton," he ran on, "you fit into the family circle here like the clasp of a real pearl necklace. So much better than if you were in a boarding-house, I can tell you. Here's Mother Yorke, and Doris, and Angie to look after you; and what more could any one ask for? I envy you, my dear. Indeed, I do. I envy you."

With a smirk he looked coyly at Angie and shook his finger at her. "I caught you at Woodsmaston the other night, little girl, hiding at that table in the corner with a married man. Naughty, naughty

Angie! But I don't blame you, kid, he's one of the few who can afford a wife and a good car, too."

"He's a very fine gentleman," Miss Clubb volunteered, "and he hardly ever takes a girl out that he don't make her a handsome little present. 'Souvenirs of a happy dinner' he calls 'em in his notes. He writes such beautiful notes, on the loveliest gray paper with a gold crest, and his presents are all such practical things. Stockings and gloves and handkerchiefs—you know—no cheap junk or candy or a chorus girl's bouquet."

"What's a chorus girl's bouquet?" Doris interrupted with some warmth of feeling.

"It's one orchid," Angie ran on placidly, "completely surrounded by a garden of cheap green stuff. I think it's an awful thing, Mr. Lusk, to see a girl sitting up with some moneyed gink in a swell restaurant with a bunch of orchids at her waist, both of them eating caviar, and all the time she's starving for a veal stew, or a porterhouse steak, sprinkled with good English chops. And as for those orchids; why for the price of half a dozen of them a girl could pay her laundry bills for a month and be careless with her duck skirts at that. But that Mr. Gilson you saw me with the other night, now he's

practical. He gave Claudine Le Mar the loveliest shirt-waist—laciest thing you ever saw. His wife's an invalid, and she just begs him to go out and have a good time."

Lusk laughed aloud and slapped his open hand against his thigh.

"My dear, if all the men who said that to chorus girls told the truth the hospitals wouldn't hold the invalid wives. I tell you, Mother Yorke, it's a fine sight for a gay bachelor's eyes to look about at your little circle here and see one contented united family in this day of alimony and unhappy marriages."

Doris clasped her hands behind her head and tilted her chair against the wall.

"I thought alimony," she suggested, "came *after* the unhappy marriages."

Lusk rubbed his hands together and laughed at the little chorus girl. "Not with me," he said, "I always think of the alimony first. I saw you the other night at the Casino, my dear, and you sure looked fine in that green dress in the second act. Yes, she did, Mrs. Yorke, fine, I tell you. Look out or she'll soon be wearng all lace shirt-waists and using club cabs. Many a girl has lost her way between the Casino stage door and the old homestead."

The girl's face flushed scarlet. She sprang to her feet and in a moment more, with her arms resting on her hips, stood looking down at Lusk. "Don't you worry about me, Max Lusk," she cried, "not for the richest broker on Wall Street!" With her tawny head held high she walked slowly out of the room and slammed the door behind her.

The round face of Mrs. Yorke had grown quite apoplectic with rage. "And what do you think of that!" she stormed. "Doris, my own daughter, and to you of all people, Max Lusk! She's a devil, that's what she is, an ungrateful little devil! Don't you mind her tantrums, Mr. Lusk. Forget it, please, just forget it."

But the broker was already on his feet and hurriedly pulling on his coat. His putty face was quite white, and his ferret eyes were snapping with anger, but he turned to Mrs. Yorke, and trying to assume an air of gaiety, patted her on her broad shoulder.

"It's all right, Mother Yorke, it's all right," he stammered. "I was a bit too free, and I like her spirit. I do, I admire her for it. Good day to you, Mrs. Yorke, and to all of you." And with a wave of his hand he beat a hasty retreat and hurried down the stairs to his waiting chariot.

It was a few days later when Fay again met Lusk. This time it was at the New York Roof Garden, where she had gone with Porter Fielding. After the first act she and Fielding had left their seats, walked back to the promenade, and stood watching the hot perspiring crowd moving up and down the broad aisle. The women for the most part wore filmy summer dresses with big flowered hats, but a few were as plainly dressed as Fay in her simple shirt-waist and duck skirt and broad-brimmed sailor hat. But notwithstanding her clothes, the unusual beauty of the girl was not lost on the crowd that moved slowly along the promenade. The women looked at her with frank curiosity and the men, walking in couples, regarded her with searching glances of ill-concealed admiration, and as they passed by where she and Fielding stood, frequently nudged each other and smiled broadly. And many of them, instead of continuing to the end of the promenade, turned quickly and retraced their steps so that they might have another look at this new beauty with the ivory skin and the wonderful masses of red hair. It was a crowd composed chiefly of the men and women whose amusement and, indeed, whose whole interests in life are bounded by Wall Street and Broad-

way,—a tired crowd satiated with good food, and strong drink, and money quickly made, and to whom a new and pretty face acts as a pleasing tonic to sluggish nerves and dulled appetites.

It was not the kind of admiration that even a girl so unsophisticated as Fay Clayton could well misunderstand, and so she took Fielding's arm, and they started to push their way through the crowd toward the aisle that led to their seats. It was at this moment that they came upon Lusk. At the sight of his friends his gray face and thin bloodless lips broke into a smile of delighted recognition, and having greeted them both with extreme geniality, he proceeded at once to introduce them to the lady with whom he was walking.

"Miss Clayton," he said, "I want you to know my very good friend, Miss Belle Gordon. I want you to know her because she's a fine girl, and especially because she's to be with you in *The Belles of Barbary*. You, being a beginner, she might help you a lot."

Belle Gordon was a very tall and very good-looking brunette with large bovine eyes, a clean healthy color in her cheeks, and a manner that seemed to exude good nature and a true spirit of kindness.

She put out a glistening white glove and shook hands with Fay with much cordiality.

"I'm glad to know you, Miss Clayton," she said in a pleasant, well-modulated voice; "and it's fine that you're to be with us. It's going to be a wonderful set of girls." And then, casting an appreciative smile at Fay's pretty face and trim lithe figure, she added: "But don't you worry, my dear, none of them'll have anything on *you*."

"Why not get together after the show," Lusk suggested, "and have a bite at the Knickerbocker?"

Fay protested that she was not properly dressed for the occasion, and indeed her simple clothes did seem somewhat inadequate when compared to the lace dress which the other girl wore, but both Miss Gordon and Lusk only laughed at her objections, and insisted that Fay and Fielding should join them.

"Anything goes in summer," Miss Gordon protested, "and besides I like your little frock. I'd have worn a duck skirt to-night myself, but the only two I have are in the wash and I didn't have enough money this week to pay my laundry bill."

With this palpably untrue but well-meant social pleasantry they parted, but with the understanding that they were to meet an hour later at supper. It

was through this chance meeting that Fay Clayton really started her career in the more or less exotic life of Broadway, and in which she was soon to play so conspicuous a part.

The first appearance of Fay under the most strenuous of New York's white lights was not, as a matter of fact, exactly as Lusk had planned it. He was sorry that her début with him in one of the big restaurants, where he was well-known, should not have been made in more spectacular raiment. He regretted, in a way, her simple if well-fitting clothes; the sailor hat which had looked so becoming at Pleasantville seemed just a trifle too simple when compared to the splendid black affair of Belle Gordon with its great bunch of bird of paradise plumes, and then Fay's white silk gloves appeared most inadequate and distinctly provincial. But in many ways the chance meeting appealed to Lusk as a fortunate one. For certain reasons, both selfish and altruistic, he had wanted Fay to meet Belle Gordon, especially before the rehearsals had begun and before Fay had had the opportunity to make friends of her own choosing among the girls in the company. Belle Gordon could be useful to the new show-girl in the theater and she had always shown

a commendable willingness to be useful to Max Lusk outside of it. Besides, his mind still rankled over the scene that had taken place during his last visit to the Yorke flat, the insult which Doris Yorke had flung at him, and to which Fay had been a witness.

Therefore, it was with unseeing eyes and unhearing ears that Lusk sat through the last part of the performance at the roof garden, but his heart was warmed with a pleasant spirit of exhilaration regarding the coming little supper-party at the Knickerbocker.

The head waiter found them a table at an open window, and Lusk placed Fay so that she could see the people as they entered the big cool-looking room with its green latticed walls and snowy white tables, each with its vase of fresh flowers, and soft pink-shaded lamp. To the country-bred girl it was like a first glimpse into fairy-land. Her young heart with all its innate love for beautiful things glowed and thrilled at the sight of it, and, then, with a sudden loathing, there flashed through her mind the thought of the stuffy dining-room at the Yorke flat, and the ill-smelling smoky restaurants, where she and Porter had had their little dinners together, and

which heretofore had seemed so bright, and so cheerful, and amusing to her. For the moment she had forgotten the inadequacy of her clothes as well as the very existence of Fielding and Miss Gordon and Lusk. In a hazy sort of way it seemed to the girl as if she had suddenly awakened to find herself in an enchanted garden where there were the low pleasant strains of sweet music and where every woman was dressed more beautifully than she had ever seen women dress before. The very air was charged with a kind of subdued gaiety and easy content, and every one seemed so kindly disposed toward every one else and to bid her, an unknown stranger, a warm and cheery welcome.

That at least two of the others at the table appeared heedless to the charm of the scene about them did not worry her for one brief moment. However callous they may have become to it all, she well knew that she had discovered a kind of paradise on earth, which seemed to satisfy all her senses, and which would always remain a joy to her. She glanced at Lusk and found him with knit brows studying the menu; Belle Gordon, across the table, was looking out of the high French window at the twinkling lights on the terrace, and stifling a yawn with her

white gloved hand, but when she turned to Porter Fielding, she found his eyes fixed on hers and in them there was a look of complete happiness. She nodded and smiled at him in a way that seemed to say, "We understand," and then unseen by the others she dropped her hand to her side, and seeking his, gently pressed it.

Of the good things that Lusk had ordered with such care for her to eat and drink Fay knew or cared but little. In a vague way she knew that it was all very dainty and that the china was exquisitely thin and that every sip of the champagne she drank from the long stemmed Venetian glass seemed to add to the warmth and beauty of the scene about her. Through the open window she could hear the rumble of the city, but here there was no turmoil, nothing but peace, the subdued strains of exquisite sensuous music, and the smiling faces of men and women, happy and content in the luxury that only money can bring.

During the supper Lusk was eagerly attentive to her and pointed out various local celebrities, seated at the different tables, or as they entered the room. Several of the actresses whom she had seen earlier that same evening on the stage came

in very late. Some were accompanied by men sufficiently old to be their fathers and others by boys still young enough to be at college, and for her own peace of mind Fay was glad to see that several of the actresses wore clothes as simple as her own. Lusk and Belle Gordon seemed to be acquainted with every one, and were constantly smiling at, and nodding to, the new arrivals, and although Fay and Fielding knew no one they were both conscious of how all the men and women who passed their table invariably looked back with glances of the frankest admiration at the new and unknown beauty. From every standpoint Lusk's little supper-party was an unqualified success and it was not until Fay was on her way home in the subway with Fielding that she realized that the happiest evening she had yet known was at an end.

Over her breakfast of coffee and eggs and bacon the next day she recounted her experiences of the previous night to the Yorke family. Mrs. Yorke and Angie plied her with innumerable questions as to every detail of the supper, but Doris remained ominously silent, and old Mr. Hooker regarded her with patriarchal solemnity over the rims of his large spectacles. When the enthusiastic recital was over

and the last possible question had been asked and answered, the old man ran his claw-like fingers slowly through his white beard and with a weary sigh shook his head and shuffled back to his rocking-chair at the window.

Doris was left to clear away the breakfast table, and, as was usually the case, Fay remained to help her. When the door was closed on them and the two girls were alone, Fay pushed her chair away from the table and stared at Doris until she had compelled the younger girl to look back at her.

"Doris," she asked, "why did old Mr. Hooker act like that, and why weren't you interested in my supper-party? Surely it was harmless enough. Don't you think I ought to have any fun? You know that there's not much fun for us here at home; is there?"

Doris' thin lips broke into a pathetic little smile and she leaned her narrow shoulders squarely against the wall and folded her arms.

"No," she said, "you're quite right, Fay. There isn't much fun at the flat here, and those swell restaurants are mighty restful and cool when it's hot outside, and they're warm and cozy in winter when it's freezing in the street, and the food is always

good. I suppose Pop sighed and went on like that because he's an old man, and then, you see, he's been in show business all of his life and has watched girls start, just as you are starting, and he naturally wonders, I suppose, how your particular case is coming out. And then, too, Pop has taken a great shine to you, Fay, just as everybody else has. I suppose it's because you're so sweet, and always cheerful, and so darned good to look at, and so terribly innocent about some things."

She hesitated, pursed her lips, and glanced out of the open window.

"Well," Fay said, "go on, Doris. Tell me what *you* think; you, yourself."

"What do I think?" Doris continued slowly. "I think that it is all a question of the price. That's it—just what you are willing to pay and that's the question that you, and I, and every girl that's working for her living in this big rotten city has got to decide sooner or later, and she's got to decide it for herself. Now your friend Porter Fielding's all right. You can't tell yet what the town will do to him in its own good time, but just now I'll bet he's clean and straight as a willow whistle."

Fay smiled. "He's all of that," she said with a touch of real pride. "Porter is the finest man I've ever known."

"Now, Max Lusk," Doris went on, "isn't a bad sort in a way. He's willing to pay the price and he pays it willingly. He's a good spender, as New York men go, but he wants his pound of flesh. He's no anonymous giver. He'd rather put a certified check for two hundred dollars into the plate at the synagogue than he would a hundred dollar bill any time, because, you see, they'd know who the check came from. Why, if Max sent a valentine present to a girl he'd put a couple of visiting cards in for fear she might think some other john had sent it. Now—"

"It seems to me," Fay interrupted with some little show of feeling, "that he is very kind. He certainly has been good to me, and to Porter, too."

"Of course he's kind," Doris went on quite unruffled. "But Lusk don't give away his kindness. He loans it out at ninety days, and he always collects his original stake, and interest, and his interest is sometimes very high. Now, Belle Gordon is a good-natured sort of a cow person. Wouldn't harm a hornet if it stung her. All she wants is a soft bed

to sleep in and plenty of good things to eat and drink, and a limousine car, and when air-ships are perfectly safe she'll want one of those, too, and she won't care very much how she gets it.

"When you start rehearsing you'll soon meet all of the girls in the troupe, and you'll find out all about them—everything. Some of them'll be good and some bad, but that'll be according to their way of looking at things, and according to your way. But my advice is to go slow and pick out your own friends and don't let Max Lusk do it for you. Anyhow, if you take my advice, you won't identify yourself with Belle Gordon, that is, unless you want to pull with her crowd, and stand for their ways, which are not the ways of a good many of the girls, or, incidentally, my ways, or the ways, I should think, of Pleasantville, New Jersey."

Fay got up and started to clear away the débris left from the breakfast, and as Doris came to help her, the older girl with a sudden impulse quickly put out her arms, and drawing the younger one to her, kissed her on the forehead.

"Thank you, Doris," she whispered. "You see, it's all so new and strange to me, and you're the only one I can depend on. Please don't think I'm

ungrateful, because I have no one else to turn to, and I need your help so much—more than you can guess. Why, kid, you must see that I don't even know the A B C of these people's language."

Doris smiled up at Fay as a mother might smile at her child, and then drawing herself away from her, once more started to clear away the table.

"That's right, Fay," she said, "I guess that's right, but after you've been in a dressing-room with that crowd at the theater for a week you'll speak their language to X Y Z and so forth. Except there is no 'and so forth' in a show-girl's alphabet—they tell every detail. But, Fay, just remember one thing. Even if you have to listen to the X Y Z of their language, and, perhaps, sometimes have to talk it yourself, remember you can always *think* in the A B C of it."

CHAPTER IV

THE day of Fay's first rehearsal came at last, and Doris went to the theater with her to introduce her to Morley, the stage-manager, and any members of the company that she happened to know. There were dozens of girls standing about the cleared stage in groups or sitting in long lines on rough wooden benches. Morley was at a little table with a long list of names before him and beside him sat Ben Tolliver, the manager and nominal owner of the show. Doris led Fay up to the table and introduced her to the two men, who, with their cigars clenched closely between their teeth, nodded at her and then with calm scrutiny looked her over from head to foot. Morley glanced at his list, and turned to Tolliver.

"She's the girl Harberg sent," he whispered; "she'll do, won't she?"

"You bet she'll do," Tolliver grunted. "Come to my office between three and four this afternoon, Miss Clayton, and I'll give you a contract."

Once more the two men nodded to her, and as Fay turned away she heard Tolliver say: "Will she do? I only wish we had a few more like her."

Doris led Fay about the stage, introducing her to several of the girls, to whom she explained that her friend was a beginner, and that they must look after her and tell her how to make up, and be dressed in time for her cues. Belle Gordon left a group of particularly well dressed and good-looking women, who, Doris explained under her breath, were the show-girls, and gave Fay a most genial welcome.

"I won't introduce you to that bunch over there," she said, "until to-morrow. There's no hurry and you'll see all you want of them and more too before the season's over. I just heard what Tolliver said to Morley about you. You start strong with the management, anyhow. By-by."

At the door that led from the street they came to another group of three girls who were standing apart from the others and whom Doris greeted with the most friendly interest.

"We're here just on the chance," one of them explained, "but I don't suppose we've got a ghost, do you?"

From where she stood Fay glanced at their poor

clothes and their hot tired faces and understood, but Doris laughed aloud and patted the girl on the shoulder.

"Why, Mazie," she said, "of course you've got a great chance. I don't think this crowd is such a much. Do you know Tolliver?"

The girl shook her head. "No, I don't, but I worked for Morley once."

"Come along with me," Doris said, and Fay watched her, followed by the three girls, push her way through the crowd to the manager's table. The two men with amused faces listened to Doris' excited earnest talk, and after a whispered conversation, Morley made a note of the girls' names and then laughingly waved them away. A moment later Doris joined Fay and they went out of the stage door and the dark gloomy theater into the hot sunshine of the street.

"That was mighty nice of you, Doris," Fay said.

But Doris only blushed and plunged into a long dissertation on the vagaries of her profession: how success depended so largely on opportunity and influence, and how seldom it came as a reward for intrinsic worth and virtue and hard painstaking effort; how the favorites of the manager and the

stage-manager got the occasional lines to read, and the small "bits" to play, and were given the "special" dresses to wear, which gave them at least a certain pictorial prominence, while the girl without friends remained season after season in the last row of the chorus.

That afternoon Fay signed a contract that called for a salary of twenty-five dollars a week. She ran down the dusty stairs from the manager's office and out into the glare of the hot sun clasping the piece of paper tightly in her hand, and for the moment she was supremely happy in the thought that she had proved her ability to earn her own living and had taken the first step up the ladder of fame. With her pretty head held high, her lips and eyes smiling with the happiness that was in her heart, she swung proudly along Broadway, and in the security of her new position, she even felt a real pang of pity for the little groups of unemployed seedy-looking actors and poorly dressed soubrettes who crowded the sidewalk. These were the members of her chosen profession who had been tried and found wanting, and failure was written large in their wan tired faces. At a glance one could see the sterility of their lives, and that they and hope and ambition

had long since parted company. But she had youth and health and superlative beauty and a joyousness in her very walk that brought smiles to even the lane of wan faces through which she passed. And, besides all this, in her hand she held a contract that guaranteed her a living income and the right to show her beauty on a Broadway stage.

The next day Fay began her rehearsals and sat on one of the many long benches, as did all the other girls, and sang the choruses of several songs from little typewritten slips of paper. This she did every morning and afternoon for a week, and then Morley took her and the other seven show-girls in hand and drilled them in a few simple dancing steps and in walking in unison up and down and across the stage. It was all very easy and while the stage-manager frequently lost his temper and swore at the chorus girls, especially those who did the more difficult dances, he always treated the eight show-girls with much respect and the greater consideration.

When the chorus was rehearsing Fay sat in the deserted orchestra seats, or in a stage-box and chatted with some of her seven co-workers, or listened to their tales of the automobile ride, or the "rough-house party" of the previous night. Several times

different girls had invited her to join them at dinners that were to be given them by their men friends, but Fay had always refused on the excuse of a previous engagement. She was still feeling her way among these new friends, and following the advice of Doris Yorke, had not allied herself with any of the different groups of girls. That there were great social distinctions between these different groups was quite evident, but as to whether these distinctions were founded on superior position on or off the stage, or on financial or moral conditions, was still, to Fay, a complete enigma.

The night rehearsals had not yet begun and so she had her evenings free to dine with Fielding. Once as a great extravagance they had gone back to the Knickerbocker, but the other nights, owing to a necessary regard for economy, they had been forced to content themselves with the less expensive table d'hôte restaurants. If the pleasures of the latter had been somewhat dimmed by a newly-gained knowledge of fairy-lit palaces farther uptown, this misfortune, in their mutual scheme of happiness, was to a great extent compensated for by the pleasure Fay found in telling of her daily work

at the theater and of her experience in the new world that was just opening before her.

It was nearly a fortnight after Lusk's little supper-party that Fay again met the man who had made her new life possible. One afternoon when the rehearsal was over she had left the stage door at the same time as Belle Gordon, and the latter had insisted on Fay walking over to her place for a cup of tea. Miss Gordon made her home in a charming little flat in an apartment-house on West Forty-sixth Street, and it so happened that it was the first time Fay had had the opportunity to see how any of her fellow-workers lived outside of the theater.

The afternoon was very hot and it was with a distinct gasp of pleasure and relief that Fay entered the small, carefully shaded sitting-room and sank into a deep wicker chair with its cool fresh covering of flowered chintz. Through half-closed eyes she glanced about the cozy homelike place with its gray and gold wall-paper and its hangings of light green silk. There were half a dozen big luxurious chairs and in one corner a low couch covered with dark green leather and in another a piano, its top littered with music. On the

mantel there was a large photograph of Miss Gordon in a silver frame, and about the walls were several mezzotints and line engravings. A pair of old-fashioned andirons glistened on the empty hearth under a white-fluted colonial mantelpiece, and wherever she turned her eyes Fay seemed to find something new and beautiful. And about it all, and above everything else, there was an air of quiet and repose that rested her and soothed her excited nerves after the long hot day at the theater.

Fay closed her eyes and gave a little sigh of pure content.

"It's so beautiful and cool and wonderful," she said, "I wonder how you can ever leave it."

"It is sort of nice," Miss Gordon laughed. "Come in and take off your hat and make yourself at home."

She led her through her dainty bedroom, with its white furniture and delicate pink hangings, to a big bathroom with glistening tiles and deep enameled tub and glass shelves covered with rows of gold-topped toilet bottles.

A few moments later Fay returned to the sitting-room, cool and refreshed, her eyes shining, and her mind satiated with the love that her mother had

given her for all that was beautiful and exquisite in material things. A pretty French maid brought them the tea-tray, and the two girls sat across the table and laughed and talked the gossip of the theater, drank their tea, and ate cakes and sandwiches as thin as wafers. And Fay fairly reveled in the comfortable luxury of it all and was wonderfully content.

It was on her way to the subway station just after she had left Belle Gordon's apartment that she met Max Lusk hurrying in the opposite direction along Forty-sixth Street.

As he caught sight of her, the little broker's face was suddenly wreathed in smiles, and he greeted her with what was apparently meant for the most heartfelt delight at the unexpected meeting.

"What luck!" he cried. "I'm glad to see you. You're looking great! Tell me how you like show business."

"Fine, as far as I've gone," Fay said, "but I'm afraid I'm taking you out of your way."

"Not at all," Lusk protested, "my way is always your way. I was just walking over to Del's to talk business with some men; but what's business to a stroll with a pretty girl? Let 'em wait!"

With a glance of pride and complete satisfaction

at his good-looking companion, he fell into step and they walked slowly toward Broadway.

"How do they treat you," he asked; "pretty good, eh? You must let me know if any of those stage-managers get gay. They're liable to be pretty fresh sometimes."

"Oh, they're all right," Fay laughed. "I guess they know I'm from the country, but I'm learning every day. Do you see my white gloves and my new sailor? Give me a few weeks more and my salary and I'll look the part all right, believe me."

Lusk glanced at the glistening gloves and the broad sailor hat and smiled his complete approval.

"And how are all the girls?" he asked. "Civil and decent to you?—they're a bit catty sometimes."

"Not to me," Fay said; "they've really been lovely. Asked me out to parties and all sorts of things, but I haven't gone to a party yet—not one."

Lusk nodded. "Just as well," he said approvingly. "Just as well to go slow. Seen anything of Belle Gordon?"

"I've just left her—she pretty near saved my life; I was so tired and weary after the rehearsal, and she asked me up to her flat for a cup of tea. My, but it's a wonderful place she's got, so dainty and

comforable! It certainly looked good after the Yorke flat; I don't know, but just quiet and peaceful. You wouldn't mind the dust and the heat of the city if you had a home like that to go to."

Lusk glanced sharply into the girl's eyes, but she was looking away and did not notice him.

Again he found his plans moving more rapidly than he had hoped for, but the conditions seemed to invite immediate action. Fay's beauty had never seemed more evident than on this summer afternoon, and besides he knew that during her two weeks of rehearsals, she must have acquired considerable knowledge as to how the other girls lived.

"That's funny," he said, "but I was just thinking when I met you that I had to look for a flat myself. There's an apartment-house a little below here where they have some fine rooms. Would you mind going with me and giving me the advantage of your advice?"

Fay was pleased and flattered at the suggestion, and a few minutes later they had entered the marble vestibule of the apartment-house and Lusk started in on a long heart-to-heart conversation with the manager.

"There's just one furnished suite left," Lusk said,

turning to Fay. "It's on the first floor. Let's go up and have a look at it."

The manager accompanied them in the elevator, showed them the rooms, and having told them of the changes he was willing to make, left them alone.

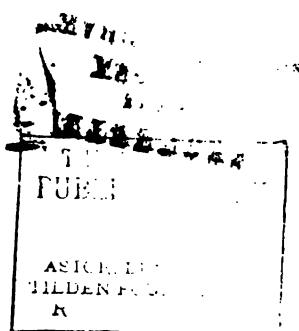
"There's plenty of space and plenty of light," Lusk said enthusiastically, "and I must say it looks pretty good to me. Of course, we can practically make any changes we wish, that is if we take it for twelve months."

While the apartment lacked the repose of Belle Gordon's, it was larger and much richer in its appointments, and Fay immediately began to speculate on the alterations in the decorations and furniture that she would make were it hers to do with as she liked. Apparently unconscious of Lusk's presence, she wandered through the different rooms, examining each detail of the decoration and every piece of furniture and bric-a-brac and picture with the greatest possible interest. At last she sank into the cushions of a low deep chair by the window, and, with half-closed eyes, looked about the cozy little sitting-room as if to get the full effect of all its luxurious comfort.

"It's lovely," she said with a little sigh, "quite



At last she sank into the cushions of a low deep chair.



lovely. I suppose you are going to take it, surely, aren't you? I wonder if I shall ever have a place like this just for my very own to work and dream in? Wouldn't it be wonderful!"

Lusk smiled and took a few steps that brought him to the side of Fay's chair.

"It is better than Mother Yorke's flat," he said, "a good deal better. More comfy and independent, too, eh?"

The little broker smiled at the girl and rubbed his thin hands briskly together.

"What do you say, my dear? It's yours, all yours, if you just say the word."

Fay looked up at the gray putty face and smiled.

"Mine?" she said incredulously. "This mine—not on twenty-five dollars a week."

"Why not?" he asked. "A year's rent and the running expenses as a little present from me. Think it over, my dear, think it over."

The girl's face grew suddenly scarlet, and with one quick movement she was on her feet and staring into Lusk's eyes, now filled with terror, as the full significance of his mistake overpowered him completely.

Her lithe figure drawn to its full height, her eyes

flashing, she drew back her strong arm and whipped her gloved hand across the miserable cringing face before her. With a cry, half fear, half rage, Lusk fell back, throwing his arms before him, and Fay, running through the open door, slammed it behind her, and rushed down the stairway to the protection of the open street.

Fay returned at once to the Yorke flat, hurried to her bedroom and locked the door. A moment later she heard the heavy footsteps of Mother Yorke coming down the hallway and this was followed by a persistent inquisitive knock. But Fay was in no mood for gossip and refused to admit her, excusing herself on the grounds of a bad headache and the urgent necessity for undisturbed rest. Her body, hot and tired, her brain still throbbing with excitement, she threw herself on the bed and lay on her back staring with dry wide eyes at the ceiling.

After a time her indignation at the insult gave way to thoughts more practical. Her mind, although still confused with many emotions, was trying to grasp some idea of just what a difference this breaking with Lusk would make in her affairs. It did not occur to her for a moment that the break

was not necessarily permanent. Any such thought to the contrary she would have cast away with indignation and disgust. But her present situation was a serious one and she thoroughly realized that she had lost the friendship of the broker at a time when it was most essential to her. In six months, perhaps in a much shorter period, she could have stood on her own feet. Now she needed this man's help. It was not only what he might have been willing to do for her, but now it became a question as to what extent he would use his influence to injure her at the theater.

And besides this, she needed money, not much, but enough to pay her actual living expenses until the season opened and she could depend on her salary. The little savings of years that she had brought with her from Pleasantville were nearly gone. There had been clothes to buy to make her look presentable at the rehearsals, and then there were the lunches between the morning and afternoon rehearsals. Several times girls, who seemed to have unlimited pocket-money, had asked her to lunch with them at the best restaurants, and Fay had always promptly returned this rather expensive hospitality. Added

to this there were the ten dollars a week for her room and board at Mrs. Yorke's, and a hundred little expenses that had reduced her meager hoard very close to the vanishing point.

With the exception of the Claytons and perhaps Porter Fielding, there was no one to whom she had the right to turn. The Claytons had not only resented her going on the stage, but were pitifully poor. Fielding was having a hard time to live and dress properly on the small salary that he was receiving from Lusk Brothers, and Fay knew, only too well, how hopelessly in debt was every member of the Yorke family. She had no jewelry nor anything of value to pawn, and a week before, when she had thoroughly appreciated the seriousness of her position, a loan from Lusk seemed the only way out of her present troubles. Half a dozen times he had offered her his help in case that such an emergency should arise, and she had practically decided that when it was absolutely necessary she would go to him and ask his aid. Of this decision she had said nothing to Porter Fielding. It would only distress him, and besides, as soon as she began to earn a salary, she could in a short time pay back Lusk his loan. But now she

could never see Lusk again, certainly never ask him a favor.

The situation seemed hopeless and once more her thoughts turned to an enforced return to Pleasantville. But it would be an enforced return. Notwithstanding the heat and dust of the baked deserted city, and in spite of its lifeless air, she knew that she loved it. The idea of returning to the quiet calm of her former uneventful life had already become well-nigh impossible to her, and the more she thought of these things, the more confused became her mind. With flushed face and temples throbbing, she jumped from the bed and took several quick turns up and down the little room. Hardly conscious of what she was doing, she called aloud for Doris Yorke.

After one glance at Fay's flushed face and excited eyes, Doris closed the door of the bedroom behind her, and taking the older girl by the hand, led her to a chair by the open window. She forced Fay to sit down, and dropping to her knees and taking both of Fay's cold hands in her own soft warm ones, she gently pressed them against her flat child's breast.

"Have your troubles really begun, dear?" she asked. "What is it, a row with the stage-manager?"

Fay looked out of the window on the dirty yellow walls of the court. She was already sorry that she had decided to tell Doris of her troubles, but it was too late now to turn back.

"No," she said in a voice that scarcely rose above a whisper, "it's worse than that; it's Lusk."

She felt the hands of the girl kneeling at her feet close tightly about her own, and it gave her confidence to go on with the story of her experience at the apartment-house. And then she hurriedly told of her fears that Lusk would have her put out of the company, of her lack of funds, and of her previous determination to borrow the money from the broker to tide over her immediate needs. Doris listened to Fay's recital of her woes with a friendly interest but a somewhat aggravating calmness and the least suggestion of a smile playing about her pale pretty lips.

"Why, that's all right, my dear," she said. "Of course, it was dull of Lusk to make his play so early in the game, but you must have known it had to come. You ought to be thankful that that particular trouble is behind you instead of ahead of you, and we can fix up the money difficulties easily enough."

There was something in Doris' manner, perhaps more than in her words, that made Fay feel that her troubles were probably not so great as she had imagined them, and she gave a sharp little gasp of relief.

"You're so very dear to me," she whispered. "Tell me what am I to do."

Doris laughed and pulled herself to her feet.

"You? You're not to do anything. You see it's like this."

She sat on the edge of the bed and rested her elbows on her knees and her chin between her palms.

"All the men in New York," she went on, "aren't Max Lusks, although when you first go into the business, you are pretty sure to think that they are. A girl in the company, let us say, has a man friend who may be a pretty good sort, but he has a man friend whom he has to take out to supper, so he asks his girl friend to bring along another girl from the company. Well, so you are chosen, and you trail along, and the chances are that the man friend is just a business acquaintance and probably a rotter, and you get all the worst of it. Believe me, the thing you've got to look out for in show business is the

man friend of the man friend of your best girl friend. But, bless you! that don't last forever, because gradually you make your own friends, and it's up to you to ask the girl to meet the unknown rotter. Mind you, I don't say that nearly all men are not alike—that is, as far as the way they treat girls on the stage—because as a matter of fact they are. But there are just enough exceptions to make men friends worth while and to keep up your belief in the sex. I know one myself."

Doris' philosophy and her hopeful outlook on life had gone far to soothe Fay's outraged feelings and now she could smile cheerfully at the chorus girl's optimism.

"Only one?" she asked.

Doris pursed her lips and knitted her brows as if in serious thought.

"Well, only one I'm perfectly sure of. His name is James Alexander Stuart. He's really a great swell, and he doesn't belong to Broadway at all, except to act as a sort of bank for chorus girls in hard luck. He says they appeal to his imagination, and his sense of humor, which free libraries and peace congresses don't. He'd love to help you out, if I

told him your story, and he wouldn't even ask me your name."

"Then why don't you ask him," Fay said, "to help your mother and Angie?"

"Never. Mother's rent wouldn't appeal to his imagination or his sense of humor at all. He knows they would laugh at him behind his back and call him an easy mark. Jimmy Stuart must be treated as a philanthropist, not as a good thing, and you must always spend the money he gives you as he tells you. I knew a girl, Tina Tracy, who was a show-girl with me once. She got a hundred dollars from Jimmy to buy a pair of antique gold shoe buckles, but before she got the buckles another girl in the company had some trouble with her lungs, and so Tina handed over the hundred to her so that she could go away on a vacation. When Jimmy heard about it he was awful mad, really mad, and said a girl threatened with consumption wasn't picturesque, but any girl who would wear a pair of antique gold buckles on shoes that were ragged and half-soled was. Then he came to me and gave me the money to have the girl with the bad lungs sent to a camp in the Adirondacks for a year. She's playing a

good part on Broadway to-day, and she'd give the world to know who saved her life, but Jimmy would never let me tell. But, at that, he's still sore about Tina not buying the buckles, and loves to go around telling everybody how she deceived him."

Doris got up and stretched her arms luxuriously above her head.

"Well, Fay," she asked, "feeling any better? Whenever your red hair and wonderful face and shape get you in trouble with too ardent admirers always come to me and I'll tell you some more tales of the Great White Way."

Fay took the little figure in her arms and kissed Doris on the forehead. "Thank you, dear," she said, "I will, always. You're a great doctor for the mind, Doris. I don't know what I should do without you."

Doris smiled and started for the door. "I guess I'll call up Jimmy now and invite him to invite me to lunch to-morrow. I'll tell him I need the money. How much do you want, Fay?"

Fay hesitated and looked away from Doris to her long slender hands which were clasped tightly together before her.

"I can't do it," she whispered, "I can't do it."

"Don't be foolish," Doris argued, "don't be foolish. Will a hundred be enough?"

Fay looked up and nodded. "Yes, more than enough, and don't forget to tell Mr. Stuart that it is only a loan and that I shall pay it back just as soon as I can from my salary."

Doris opened the door and then turned to Fay and solemnly shook her head and the tousled mass of yellow curls.

"All right, my dear," she said a little wearily, "I'll tell him if you insist on it. But, heavens, Fay, Jimmy knows that people in our business always *borrow* money just as well as he knows they never pay it back."

Fay's face flushed a brilliant scarlet. "What do you mean, Doris? You know that I'll pay it back."

"That's all right," Doris said assuringly, "of course, you will. But you'll learn in time, a pretty short time probably, that the only real, satisfactory, commonwealth plan of living in the world is the present arrangement between the New York swells and our best little chorus girls. By-by."

Before Fay could answer her the door was suddenly closed with unnecessary violence, and she heard Doris singing cheerily on her way down the

hall to telephone her altruistic friend, Mr. James Alexander Stuart, that most wonderful of all New York men, an eccentric who gave something for nothing and who found pleasure in the doing of it.

CHAPTER V

A FEW minutes later Doris knocked at Fay's door, and then opened it just enough to show her smiling face and a broad white felt hat half concealing her tousled yellow curls.

"It's all right, my dear," she cried, "I'm to meet him at lunch to-morrow, and I told him to stop in on his way there and get some of those crisp yellow-backs they give you at restaurants and ladies' banks."

Fay looked at Doris with eyes still wet and eyelids red from crying. "I'm sorry, so sorry. I've been such a fool."

"Don't you worry, now," Doris urged sympathetically. "You've got a lot to learn yet. By-by, I'm off to dinner down-town. Are you going to dine with Fielding?"

Fay shook her head. "Not to-night. Somehow, I don't feel up to it, after that scene with Lusk. I'm afraid I might break down and tell Porter, and that would mean the end of both of us. I think I'll

have dinner here and then take a walk later. I want to be alone. Good night."

"Have it your own way," Doris called. "Good night to you."

Fay got up, and going to the mirror, gazed for a long time at her white face and reddened eyes, and then drew the back of her hand several times slowly across her forehead.

"I wonder how long it's been," she said half aloud, "since you looked like that. You're a sight."

Then she went out of her room into the hallway and telephoned Fielding that she had a bad headache, and was feeling generally miserable, and would be unable to come to dinner. The sound of his voice and his words of sympathy only increased the nervousness from which she was still suffering and she hurriedly said good night and rang off. For a moment she hesitated at her own door, but she was tired of the close, dark, little bedroom, and hearing Mrs. Yorke at work in the kitchen, went out into the sitting-room. There she found Mr. Hooker sitting as usual at the open window, his eyes half-closed, and the evening paper lying at his feet. With a sudden impulse of pity, due to her own unhappy plight, she crossed the room, and kneeling at the side

of the old man, leaned her elbows on the arm of his rocking-chair.

"What were you thinking about?" she asked; "please tell me."

The old man looked up with a little start, and putting out his hand gently, touched the girl on the mass of hair over her broad clear forehead. Then, leaning his head against the back of the rocking-chair, with half-closed eyes, he looked up at the gray smoke-begrimed ceiling.

"I was dreaming, my dear young lady," he whispered, "just dreaming."

"Dreaming?" she repeated.

"Yes. I only have two dreams, which must seem very strange to you when you think of how many hours I sit here in the same chair, looking out of the same window at the same old tenement house across the way. You see you are young and have many dreams as all young people should have. I had many, many dreams when I was your age, but just now there are only the two."

With her soft white fingers Fay touched those of the old man resting on his knee.

"Please tell me," she said, "what are the two dreams about? I'd really like so much to know."

"Would you?" he said. "I think I'll tell you because you would understand so much better than the others. No one understands me here, except, perhaps, little Doris. My first dream, my dear, is of a young man with long black hair, and he is dressed in a velvet coat, and plaid trousers, and a broad felt hat. He is standing on the steps of a wagon which is painted with gay colors, and in large gilt letters on the sides are the words 'The Great Mozark.' Back of him there are two horses feeding in a green field, and before him there is a broad roadway. The roadway is filled with a great crowd of farmers and their wives and little children, and they are all laughing at the funny stories he is telling them. And why shouldn't they laugh, for there is a blue sky over their heads, and there is nothing about them but green pastures, and fields of waving corn, and wheat, and shade trees, and the curious-looking man in the long hair who tells them funny stories? Then, when they are laughing the loudest, he tries to sell them bottles of medicine which he pretends will cure every ill under the sun, and while they really cure none, do no harm at all.

"When the sun has set and the people have gone

to their homes for supper, the Great Mozark feeds his horses and cooks his own supper in a little oven in his wagon, or over a wood fire at the roadside. Afterward he smokes his pipe and counts the money he has made from the bottles of medicine he has sold. And later the crowd comes back, only, it is a bigger crowd now, and the medicine man stands between two flaming torches and tells his stories and bandies words with the onlookers and sells his elixir of life. Late at night, when he is alone once more, he goes to bed on a canvas cot in the gay-painted wagon, or, when the weather is warm and fine, he wraps himself in a great blanket and sleeps on the ground with only the stars overhead.

“At the break of day, when the sun is just showing itself over the tree-tops, and the dew covers the fields, the birds sing their morning songs and wake the medicine man from his long sleep. After he has washed and dressed the Great Mozark feeds his horses and cooks his own good breakfast. Then with the sun up, but the fields still damp with dew and the birds hopping and skipping about him, he starts on to the next little village, laughing and talking to his horses as he goes. I can see him now as

he drives slowly over an open sunlit road, or again along a silent wood-road under the boughs of the forest trees."

The old man pressed his thin white hands over his eyes and gave a little sigh. "That, my dear young lady," he said, "is one of my dreams."

"And the other?" Fay asked.

"The other? The other is of a farmhouse just like the one I used to know a very long time ago, and whenever my travels brought me anywhere near to that neighborhood I used to hunt up the place and lean over the fence, and wish that some day the house and the farm and the garden might be mine. It was just an old whitewashed house with a broad porch, and a couple of rocking-chairs on it, and all around the house there was an orchard, and there were always some cows and chickens fooling about, and there was also one of those old-oaken-bucket wells. It really wasn't much of a place, but there was a wonderful peace that seemed to brood over it and shut it out from the rest of the world. I was young then and full of deviltry, too, but I always somehow pictured myself one day sitting on that porch, and looking out on the orchard, and seeing the sun set, and the light of the day fade into twi-

light and then into the black night—the night that all of us must face sometime.”

The old man sighed and smiled at Fay. “Those are my dreams, my dear young lady,” he went on, and then, nodding his head toward the open window and the brick building across the way, hideous with its network of rusty iron fire-escapes; “and this,” he added, “is my life.”

Fay pressed one of his hands in both of hers. “I understand what you mean,” she said, “and I’m glad that you told me about your dreams. You see I came from the country, too. I’ve lived there all of my life, and I’m sure I love it just as you love it.”

“And yet you came to this.”

For a few minutes Fay hesitated. “You see, Mr. Hooker,” she explained, “I wasn’t very happy where I was.”

The old man looked down at the girl’s face and nodded.

“I don’t suppose any young girls or any young men are ever quite happy in the country until they have had the chance to get away from it for a time. They want to make a try for success in the big towns, and fight, and suffer, and cry as you, my dear, I fear have been suffering and crying.”

Fay glanced up and smiled through her tear-dimmed eyes. "But if I succeed?" she asked. "Suppose some day—mind you, I say some day—I should become famous. You were an actor once, at least, so Mrs. Yorke says—you surely must know what I mean."

The old man chuckled and slowly shook his venerable head.

"I was the Great Mozark, the Medicine Man, a faker, a gypsy, but my own master. For a few weeks I was an actor, but I threw up my job and went back to the road—not the road of the player of to-day, but the broad highway of the open country that leads to the village greens. No dogs of managers and stage-managers for me—I was as free as the air I breathed. If it was my pleasure, I could work and tell my stories and sell my elixir of life; or, if it better suited my mood, I could camp in a grove of trees and for days take my ease on the banks of a stream of crystal water, and loaf and dream idle useless dreams.

"When I was an actor there was no moment that I could call my own. During the day I was at the beck and call of a stage-manager who

dragged me from my bed in a stuffy hotel to rehearse or to sit for hours in a dark ill-smelling theater. At night I had to paint my face, wear foolish clothes, and read the lines and speak the thoughts of another man. My dear young lady, you may grow old in this profession which you have chosen and some day you may become the most famous actress in all the world, but it is well for you to remember now and while you are just at the beginning of your career, that every night when other people are enjoying their hours of ease that you must work. And you must paint your sweet pretty face for them, and even if you read the lines and speak the thoughts of Shakespeare you are still only a distant echo—a puppet, spouting the words and thoughts of some one other than yourself, some one much greater than you can ever hope to be. Don't answer me if you would rather not, but just suppose that you were not satisfied with this life here which you have chosen, could you go back to your own home in the country? I like you so much, my dear, that it would give me a great deal of happiness to think that you could do that. Tell me—could you go back there—do your people still want you?"

Fay drew a long breath and tried to smile up at the kind serious eyes of the old man. "Why, yes," she sighed, "I think I could go back."

"I heard something from Doris of your life," he said, "and of your going away from home. It would be a pity to cut yourself off from all that. Tell me, if you don't mind, have you written to them since you have been here?"

Fay shook her head, and her voice scarcely rose above a whisper. "I'm afraid not. I've been so busy and then, you see, they were very, very much hurt at my going away."

"Old people are easily hurt," he said, "just as young people are a little thoughtless sometimes. It seems a pity to cut them out entirely. It's not a pretty sight to watch the back-log of your life burn to ashes and make no effort at all to save it. Why not write to them now and ask if you can't go to see them? It's not far—you could get away from your work on Sunday, surely."

The shadows suddenly faded from the girl's face, a new light shone through the misty eyes, and she rose quickly to her feet.

"Thank you so much," she said, "I'll telegraph them now and ask if I may spend next Sunday with

them. Please don't think that I'm ungrateful to them, will you? I don't want you to think that of me."

Fay leaned over and gently touched the old man's forehead with her lips. A moment more and she had left the room and was on her way to telegraph the Claytons and was supremely happy in the thought of seeing them so soon again.

It was shortly after dinner when the answer to her telegram arrived. She was with Mrs. Yorke in the dining-room, helping the older woman to clear away the dishes, but wishing to be alone, she went into her bedroom and carefully closed and locked the door. With trembling fingers she opened the envelope and read the message that was signed by old man Clayton.

"Your mother has decided that she does not want to see you on Sunday or at any time. I am so sorry."

With the telegram stretched tightly between her hands, Fay read and reread its words many times, and then let the yellow piece of paper flutter to the floor. For a long time she sat on the edge of the bed, her elbows on her knees, her chin between her

palms, her dry eyes staring steadily into space. At last she stooped, and picking up the telegram, carefully folded it and put it in the pocket of her dress. After this she slowly crossed the room, and for a long time stood looking out of the open window at the dark walls of the court. Then she turned back to the stuffy little bedroom with its gaudy soiled wall-paper, lighted by one flickering gas-jet. With halting unsteady steps she went over to her bureau and looked at herself in the glass, and slowly ran her long tapering fingers through the masses of red hair.

"Well," she said to the white dreary face in the mirror, "the back-log is burned, all right—burned to ashes. I'm sorry for you, but I guess this isn't your day. You're standing on your own feet now, for sure, Fay, and it's up to you, just you. And you've got to make good."

She wondered why she did not break down and cry at her own pitiable plight. It would have been a great relief to her, she was quite sure, but it was no more physically possible for her to cry then than it would have been to laugh aloud. Without any effort to arrange her hair or to make herself more presentable, mechanically she put on her hat, and noiselessly closing her bedroom door behind her,

walked softly down the hallway and let herself out of the flat.

Having reached the street, she found that there was a heavy mist and that a light rain had begun to fall, but she paid no heed to this, and with lowered head walked on, looking neither to one side nor the other. For the first time since she had come to New York she felt the loneliness of a great city. During the last few hours she had been insulted by a man whom she had believed to be her friend, and she had been cast adrift from the only home that she had ever known. These were the two thoughts that crowded her aching brain as, heedless of whither her steps were leading her, she hurried along the rain-swept deserted streets. Once she was nearly run over by a cable car, but deaf to the curses of the motorman, and apparently indifferent to the accident she had so barely escaped, she hurried quickly on her way. At last her unguided steps led her to Broadway, and the glow of the myriads of colored lights brought to her a sudden realization of where she was. The rain had almost ceased now, and she was conscious that the passers-by were regarding her curiously.

As she stopped at a corner, uncertain which

way to turn, a man approached her and with a smile offered to take her home in a taxicab. Fay turned on him with the fierceness of a tigress at bay, and in her rage she would have struck him. But the first glance at the girl's face was sufficient for the man, and he hurried on his way. The only thought that filled her mind now was for her personal protection. It seemed to her half-crazed brain as if she were the prey of the whole merciless city and that she must find some one, and at once, to help her. Her first thought was naturally Fielding, and on the bare chance that he would be at home, she boarded a car that she knew would take her almost to the door of the house in which he lived.

She held her thumb against the electric button over his letter-box in the lower hallway until, to her supreme relief, she heard the answering click of the lock of the front door. Tired as she was she fairly flew up the two long flights of stairs and did not slacken her pace until she saw Fielding standing in the doorway of his apartment. Breathless, she pushed aside the hand that he held out to her, and exhausted from her long walk, fell panting into the nearest chair that offered itself to her tired body. In a moment he was kneeling at her side.

"Why, Fay, dear," he said, "you're faint, and your clothes are drenched. Tell me what's happened, dear, *please* tell me."

Fay brushed away the loose strands of hair that had fallen across her damp forehead and made a futile effort to smile away Fielding's alarm over her forlorn condition.

"I had a terrible headache," she explained in a low half-incoherent voice, "and I thought a long walk would do me good, and it began to rain. I don't know, but I think I must have lost my way. And then a strange man insulted me in the street. I could have killed him, but he ran away from me and I started on again, but I couldn't think of anything except that I had been taken for that kind of a woman. And, oh, Porter, I wanted so much some one to protect me, and to put their arms about me and love me. And then I thought of you, and—and here I am."

For a moment she stretched her arms above her head and then dropped them again, and with a long sigh, her whole body seemed to relax and crumple up, and she sank into the depths of the big armchair.

Fielding rose from his knees, and when he spoke it was much as he would have done to a spoiled

child. "Fay, you're tired out, and you're hysterical, and you're wet to the skin. What you need is a big glass of whisky. Then you can go into the bedroom and put on some of my clothes and dry your own in front of the gas stove."

Too exhausted to argue, Fay nodded her assent, and with some little effort sat up in the chair, and pulling out her hatpins, laid her bedraggled straw hat on the table. In a few moments Fielding returned with a glass of whisky, and taking Fay by the hands, slowly pulled her to her feet.

"I've lighted the stove," he said, "and here's your drink. Now take it with you, and don't drink it all at once. There's a lot of it even for a girl as played out as you are."

Fay took the glass of whisky, and putting it to her lips, smiled over the rim at Fielding. She took but a sip and then started for the bedroom, but when she had reached the door, she raised the glass again to her host and took another sip.

"I'm an awful nuisance, Porter—*aren't* I?" she laughed. "But I had to talk to somebody—I've had a rotten day of it."

"That's all right," Fielding said, "hurry up and

get out of those wet things. You'll find plenty of my clothes lying around, or in the wardrobe."

With a cheerful smile of farewell, Fay disappeared through the door and closed it behind her.

Fielding walked up and down the room several times, stopped to light a cigarette, inhaled a few long puffs, and then tossed it into the empty fireplace. The spirit of adventure had never been very strongly developed in him, and Fay's unexpected visit did not appeal to him at all. He could not understand why she should deliberately break an engagement to dine with him and then, well toward midnight, suddenly turn up at his rooms, drenched to the skin, and bordering on a condition of nervous collapse. Always in the best of health himself, he had a secret loathing for sickness in the case of any one else. Wholly ignorant of the trials that Fay had borne during the last few hours, he had little sympathy for her present complete state of exhaustion.

To Fielding's carefully regulated, unemotional mind nothing could excuse a girl voluntarily walking through the streets of New York alone on a rainy night, and especially on Broadway, where she would naturally be subject to the insults of any

casual passer-by. He could not comprehend at all why she had not gone to her own room at the Yorke flat instead of coming to a bachelor's apartment at so very late an hour in the evening. And besides all this, her use of the word "rotten" annoyed him extremely. Already he had spoken about it on several different occasions since she had come to New York to live, and he could not understand why she should not respect his wishes in a matter of this sort. He was convinced that it was one of the results of her companionship with the girls at the theater, and decided that he must speak to her at once, and beg her that there might be no further laxity in her former standards of speech or actions.

Suddenly the door leading into the bedroom opened and Fay came slowly into the sitting-room. She was clad in a long gray overcoat below which showed the ends of a pair of turned-up flannel trousers, small bare ankles, and feet partially concealed by very large bath slippers. The coat collar was turned up and buttoned across her throat, and she had done her hair loosely in a great roll on the top of her head. Her face was flushed, her eyes sparkled and her lips were smiling with pleasurable delight at her

own quaint appearance. The huge bath slippers greatly impeded her progress, and she shuffled with a slow skating motion half-way across the room and fell into the depths of a low armchair. She looked up at Fielding with a sly sort of twinkle in her eyes and chuckled audibly.

"Don't you think I make a pretty boy, Porter?" she asked. "'Cause I think I make an awful pretty boy—awful pretty. Most fascinating and insidious."

Fielding stood before the hearth, and with his hands clasped behind his back, looked down at the lovely lithe figure in the comic ill-fitting clothes and the face which never before had appeared to him so brilliantly beautiful as it did now. But in no way did he show his admiration for the girl's loveliness. With some little difficulty Fay succeeded in pushing one of her hands out of the long sleeve of the overcoat, beckoned to him and motioned him to a place at the side of her chair.

"Thank you, no," Fielding said shortly. "I prefer to stand where I am." And then suddenly added the wholly unnecessary question, "Are you feeling any better?"

Fay pouted her scarlet lips and looked up at him with a frown.

"Course I'm feeling better. Anybody could see that. I said to myself just now in the other room when I was looking into the mirror, I said, 'Fay, you do look funny in that rig, but you look awful pretty and even Porter—and Porter certainly's a cold proposition—will surely love you when you look like that.'"

After this speech Fay looked at Fielding with sprightly inquisitiveness, but finding that he was still gazing down at her with grave curious eyes, she sighed and slowly shook her head.

"It's funny to me," she said dreamily, "how all the men I meet seem to love me—all except you, Porter. Now, if—"

"Men have different ways of showing their love," he interrupted. "Perhaps it is because I love you so much that you hurt me so much, and I can't tell you that I love you."

Fay no longer smiled, but looked up at Fielding with wide questioning eyes.

"Hurt you?" she asked. "I hurt you!"

"Yes," he said. "You've hurt me to-night."

"How?"

"By coming here when you should have gone to your own home. By wandering alone through the streets and laying yourself open to being insulted by any blackguard who happened along."

Fay nodded. "I see what you mean."

"And then," Fielding went on, "I told you not to use that word 'rotten'. You didn't say it before you got mixed up with that crowd at the theater. I don't see why you should let down just because your profession makes it necessary for you to mix up with people who happen to be beneath you in education and breeding."

Fay clasped her hands behind her head and looked stolidly up at the ceiling.

"How do you know that I'm any better bred than those girls? I don't. All you and I know, and anybody else knows, is that I was washed up on the beach. Everything else about my fine breeding is hearsay, tradition—no doubt evolved from the brain of Mother Clayton. She wanted to believe it, and so she made herself believe it and made others believe it, too, I guess. I'd like to think that my mother was a lady and—and a good woman. But, do you know sometimes, Porter,—that is, if I am to judge by her daughter—can you let me have an-

other little drink? I'm tired, and I've had a bad day."

Fielding shook his head. "I'm sorry," he said significantly, "but it's all gone."

Fay tossed her chin in the air, and her eyes flashed. "You mean you think that I've had enough. Will you phone for a taxi, please? Don't worry, I've got the price."

Fielding looked down at her with serious anxious eyes.

"I thought perhaps that you might let me take you home."

Fay threw her head against the back of the chair and closed her eyes. "Oh, Porter," she sighed, "how I wish sometimes that you could understand me; that you were not always so fine, and strong, and hard—just a little human for once in your life."

With her eyes still closed she slowly stretched out her arms toward him and pressed her finger-nails hard into the soft palms of her white hands.

"Kiss me, Porter," she cried, "kiss me, just once on the lips."

Fielding drew himself to his full height, and with a slight shrug of his broad shoulders, crossed the room to the telephone.

"No, Fay," he said, "not to-night. Don't be foolish."

She pulled herself slowly from the chair, and without looking at Fielding, pushed her feet farther into the big bath slippers, and then, with no more words, shuffled back into the bedroom. By the time that she had dressed herself again in her own clothes the taxicab had arrived, and Fielding led the way in silence down the two long flights of stairs. He opened the cab door and helped her in.

"You're quite sure that you don't want me to go home with you?" he asked.

Fay shook her head. "No, thank you, Porter. I think I'd rather go back alone."

"Good night, then," he said. "You're sure you have the fare?"

For answer Fay nodded and wearily rested her head against the cushions of the open cab. "Good night," she called, but her words scarcely rose above a whisper, and were lost in the whirring noise of the machine, as, with a sudden jolt, it started on its way.

At an early hour the following morning Fay was awakened by Mrs. Yorke, who brought her a box of flowers that had been sent by messenger. For

a few moments the older woman lingered about the room, in the hope that Fay would open the box and tell her from whom the flowers came. But as Fay showed no inclination to do anything of the kind, with profuse apologies for her intrusion, Mrs. Yorke reluctantly took her leave. The moment the door had closed Fay cut the strings from the box, and opening the lid, found a sealed note lying on a bunch of scarlet roses. With trembling fingers she tore open the envelope and at the first glance recognized the card as Fielding's. His message she read over and over again. There was only one line scribbled in pencil—"I forgive you—Porter." For a few moments Fay did not seem to understand just what the message meant, and then the hot blood surged into her face, and tearing the card into small pieces, she threw them out of the open window.

"*He forgives me,*" she repeated again and again. "Porter forgives *me.*"

With both hands she raised the open box of long-stemmed roses high above her head and was about to hurl it, too, through the window. And then something seemed to hold back her arms, and with a sudden change of movement, she buried her

hot burning face in the bunch of damp fragrant flowers. "After all," she whispered fiercely, "he did send me roses, and it's the first time in his life he ever did that—and I love him for it—yes, I do, I love him for it."

Later that morning Fay went to rehearsal, depressed and very unhappy. She was listless in her work and not sure of herself, and for the first time was sharply reprimanded by the stage-manager. During the long intervals, when her set of girls was not on the stage, she sat alone in the back of the dark gloomy auditorium and sullenly brooded over her troubles.

In the morbid condition of her mind it seemed as if Lusk, the Claytons and even Fielding had all turned irrevocably against her, and for the first time she seriously doubted the wisdom of her choice in coming to New York. But, to her great sorrow, she realized fully that the time had come when it was too late to turn back. Even her bridges at Pleasantville had been burned away, and she thoroughly appreciated that the stage career, which she had formerly regarded as an experiment, had now become an absolute necessity as her only means of livelihood. As far as Lusk was concerned she had al-

ways cared but little for him, and her only fear was that he would use his influence with the management against her.

But it was very different in the case of Porter Fielding. His friendship and the hours they spent almost daily together were the best part of her life, and without them the future, as far as she could see, offered her but little promise. The thought that she had lost him through an impetuous and foolish act of her own was intolerable to her, and she determined to see him at the first opportunity. Night rehearsals were to begin that day, and as they started early in the evening it would hereafter be inconvenient for him to dine with her. Therefore, she could depend on seeing him only during the late afternoon or after the night rehearsal was over. But whatever plans they might arrange for the future, Fay felt that she could no longer endure the doubt in her mind as to Fielding's present feelings toward her, and, therefore, on her way to lunch she stopped at a hotel and telephoned him to his office. His cheery words of greeting brought to her the first happy moment of the day. After speaking of her gratitude to him for the roses he had sent her, she told him about the night rehearsals, and

asked if she might come to see him at his rooms that afternoon. His apparent sincere pleasure at the prospect of seeing her so soon dispelled the last of her morbid fears, and quite happy and contented again, she hurried on to her lonely lunch.

It was five o'clock when, still a little doubtful of just what she was to say, Fay went slowly up the stairs that led to Fielding's apartment. But when she had reached the second landing and saw him waiting for her at the doorway, with a little cry of pleasure, she ran to him. Once in the room and the door closed, he put his arms about her, and for the first time in his life, kissed her on the lips.

"I'm so sorry, Fay, dear," he said, "but I wasn't myself at all last night. I know I acted like an awful brute, and then I sent you that silly priggish message this morning. But that's all over now, isn't it? Just as if it never was?"

Fay looked up at him and smiled her complete forgiveness, and then taking him by the hand, led him across the room.

"Now, Porter," she said, "I'm going to sit in the big chair, and you get a cigar. Then bring that foot-stool over and sit at my feet, because I've got a great deal to say to you. Oh, I've had such a lot

of troubles, and I wanted to tell you all about them last night, but somehow you seemed different and unsympathetic, and I couldn't talk to you then."

Fielding did as he was told, and when he was seated comfortably at her feet, laid his hand over the girl's and pressed it gently.

"Now, Fay," he said, "go ahead and tell me all about all of your troubles—every one of them."

But Fay did not tell him all of her troubles. If she spoke of her fight with Lusk, she knew that it could only lead to a serious row between the broker and Fielding, as a result of which Porter would undoubtedly lose his position, and this, at the present time, would be fatal to his career. It seemed equally useless to speak of the hundred dollars that she had borrowed through Doris. It would only distress Fielding, and he would insist on paying the money back from his own meager savings, or, failing in this, would no doubt borrow from Max Lusk, which would render the situation still more impossible to Fay. Therefore, she began the story of her troubles with the telegram she had sent the Claytons, asking them if she might visit them over Sunday. She had brought the answer

with her, and when she showed it to Fielding, he read it over several times and then smiled and handed it back to her.

"That's all right, Fay," he said, "I'll run down myself on Sunday and fix it up for you easily enough. You can see that the old man is still strong for you."

Fay nodded, but her effort to smile was a complete failure.

"Thank you, Porter, but there's no use. I know Mother Clayton and I know when her mind is once made up that nothing can ever change it. I tell you, it's over. I have no home, now—nothing."

He took one of her hands in both of his and touched her fingers gently with his lips.

"Yes," she said, "I know I've got *you*. But suppose I should fail on the stage. Suppose I should lose my place with this company. Where could I go, what could I do?"

"My dear child," Fielding laughed, "there are other companies—lots of them."

"Yes, I know," she said, "but there are not other homes—that is for me. I tell you, Porter, I've lost something that I can never get back, never. That

part of my life is over, and I'm just about beginning to understand what a big part of my life it really was."

She reached out her free hand and laid it on his shoulder and looked steadily into Fielding's serious eyes.

"So you see, Porter," she went on, speaking very slowly, "that's why you've got to be good to me. And, sometimes, when I am a little weak or foolish, you mustn't be hard on me, but try to understand and forgive me."

Fielding got up, and holding out both hands, drew Fay to her feet.

"All right," he said, smiling, "I promise you, Fay, that I'll do my best. And now make yourself some tea, and I'll have a drink."

It was an hour later when Fay returned to the Yorke flat and in the privacy of her bedroom Doris handed her a hundred dollars in crisp twenty-dollar notes.

"He was charmed to make the loan," Doris said, "completely charmed. I told him I wanted him to meet you one of these days, and he said that that was entirely up to you."

The chorus girl started to leave the room and Fay put out her hand. "Thank you, Doris," she said. "You're a good friend. Did you—did you tell him my name?"

"No," Doris laughed, "of course, I didn't. That's also up to you."

When Fay was alone she stood for some moments in the center of the room staring at the roll of yellow-back bills in her hand, and then, overcome with a sudden loathing for the money and herself, she tossed it on the bureau. Exhausted from her long day of work and trouble, she sank wearily on the edge of the bed and started slowly to unbutton her shoes.

"You're a fool, Fay Clayton," she mumbled; "a poor weak fool. I wonder if your mother would have taken money from a man she'd never met?"

She kicked off her loosened shoes, and with her hands clasped behind her, fell back on the bed and lay staring up at the ceiling.

"I wonder," she said; "I wonder if she would."

CHAPTER VI

FOR the following two weeks Fay had to devote practically all of her time to *The Belles of Barbary*. There were rehearsals every morning, afternoon and night, and when not at the theater she was holding long sessions either at the dressmaker's or bootmaker's or photographer's. To her it was all distinctly new and very exciting, and she found it intensely interesting to watch how the various parts of the new opera were being welded into a complete whole. The principals were rehearsing with the chorus and show-girls now, and as a rule she found them much more simple and friendly than the less conspicuous members of the company. The women who were to play the principal parts seemed more than willing to help her in any way they could, and the men were all most kind and a few quite conspicuous in their attentions to her.

Of Fielding she saw but little, but at least once every day she talked to him over the telephone, and several times, late in the afternoon, she had stopped

in at his rooms for a cup of tea. The infrequency with which she now saw him seemed only to add to the pleasure of these occasional visits, and they were largely spent in discussing the good times they were to have together after *The Belles of Barbary* had been tried for a week out of town and Fay had returned to New York to settle down for the winter. At no time in her life had she ever felt so secure of Fielding's affection for her, and at no time before had she ever appreciated how very much the real friendship of a strong man meant to a girl who was placed as she was. So, if Fay and Fielding saw less of each other during these last two weeks of rehearsals, both of them regarded the new arrangement as purely temporary, and both looked forward to the time when they could resume the old order of things and be sure of seeing each other at least once every day.

It was at the very end of August when *The Belles of Barbary* opened its preliminary season in Atlantic City. This trying out of the new play, that is, as far as Fay could judge by appearances, was regarded by the principals of the company, and certainly by the members of the chorus, entirely in the light of a pleasure outing, and not at all as a serious busi-

ness undertaking. Even Ben Tolliver, the manager, and the men who were known or who were supposed to have money interests in the enterprise, suddenly dropped their manner of mystery, became most genial, and spent many hours between the rehearsals and performances in the company of some of the best-looking of the actresses.

It turned out to be one of those rare occasions in the theatrical world when from the very beginning success seems to be an undisputed fact, and the usually much-dreaded first night in New York is looked forward to by those most interested with keen anticipation rather than as a terrifying ordeal. The local critics and the managerial experts, even the chary speculators who had come down from town, had agreed that *The Belles of Barbary* was an assured success. Therefore, content was in the very air, and every one was happy—the managers because they saw the prospect of solid financial returns for their investment, and the members of the company because success meant a season's run in the big city—six months at least in their cozy flats, instead of weary days and nights of travel, and stuffy hotels and the crowded dressing-rooms of "the road".

As in all musical comedies there was a certain

amount of rehearsing to be done in the week that immediately preceded the great night of the opening on Broadway. But to offset this there was plenty of time for ocean baths, leisurely strolls along the board-walk, and pleasant little suppers that began after the performance was over and usually continued far into the morning hours. In addition to all this, at least to Fay, there was the excitement of the actual performance, the thrill of the lights and the music, and the rapid changing from one wonderful costume to another still more wonderful. For the first time in her life her desire to wear beautiful clothes had been realized, and from the night of the first dress rehearsal it was quite evident that the considerable sum of money lavished on Fay's particular dresses had not been spent in vain. Of the eight show-girls there was no doubt that she was easily the most conspicuous. Indeed, in the ensembles, she was without question the most noticeable and most beautiful woman on the stage, and it was a collection of women which had been gathered together largely with an eye to female loveliness. Fay heard her praises not only from the men and women of the company, but she saw it plainly in the eyes of the

audience. And besides all this she appreciated the fact that she was new to New York.

The men who had run down from town to see their women friends in the company raved about her, and predicted for her a wonderful success on the first night, at least a success of beauty. As a matter of fact, she had little to do in the performance, but Fay had always been naturally graceful and endowed with wonderful personal charm. And now she carried the same grace of movement and the same charm to her stage work, and above all else, she always seemed to be absolutely at her ease. Added to this, she had real animation, a great buoyancy of spirit, the physical condition of a splendid healthy animal, and the intense interest in her work which it was only too evident that most of her fellow-workers had long since lost. She was happy to be back once more near the sea where she could hear the sound of the breakers; she was supremely happy in her work and in the thought that she was earning her own living. Indeed, for the first few days of her stage life, the cup of her joy was filled to the brim and overflowing.

It had been impossible for Fielding to get away for the first night at Atlantic City, but he had sent

her a long telegram, and after the performance was over, she had sent him in return, a very, very long one telling him of the play's great success and of her own superlative happiness.

During the earlier part of the evening Belle Gordon had asked Fay to go to a supper which some men, who had come down from New York, were giving to herself and several of the other show-girls. Had it been in the city she would have refused, as she had, heretofore, refused all of Belle Gordon's invitations, as well as those of the other girls. But now the conditions were different, and as she had already told Belle that she knew no one in Atlantic City she could not well excuse herself on the grounds of a previous engagement. Under the circumstances there seemed nothing left for her to do but to accept the invitation. And, as a matter of fact, she did accept gladly, as, on such a gala night, it would have seemed hard indeed to have returned to her hot stuffy bedroom at the hotel.

The men met their guests at the stage door and carried them off in two big touring cars to the Shellbourne. The large dining-room was crowded almost entirely with members of the company and their friends from town, and every one beamed on

every one else, and the air was full of congratulations on the great success of the new play. It was really like one very large and boisterously happy party. Fay sat between two young men, one of whom told her that she was even more beautiful off the stage than she was on it, and when the other had expressed the exactly opposite opinion, both youths gave up any further personal remarks and devoted themselves to long libations of champagne and the general chorus of gossip.

Miss Gordon, on whom the responsibilities of hostess weighed but lightly, waved her hand to Fay and smiled pleasantly at her beautiful guest across the table. "It certainly is good," she said, "to have you with us at last, Fay. I tell you, boys and girls, this room looks just like an opening night used to at old Rector's. It's sure one grand occasion. I can't see a thing here that hasn't been branded by Broadway. If I—"

"Well, well," Miss Mazie Kane interrupted, "what do you think of that!" Miss Kane was not of the company, but had run down with a party of friends in an automobile to see the launching of the new play. In New York she was noted for her innocent blond beauty, her ceaseless chatter, and a sustained

devotion to the predatory rich. "If there ain't Inez Morrell," she ran on, "and Inez is with Eddie Sommers. Well, well! *Inez* can come back all right, and I'll bet she is glad to be talking to a man again old enough to have cut all his teeth. Have any of you noticed the ginks and rah-rah boys she's been doing time with lately? Why, do you know, that Inez Morrell has been robbing nurseries so long that when she was in the hospital last spring the nurses said she used to talk baby talk all the time in her sleep—honest they did."

About the table mild laughter greeted these somewhat personal remarks. "She used to be with me in *The Doll-baby Girl*," Miss Kane hurried on. "Yes, she did."

"I remember you in that piece," one of the men interrupted. "In the first act you played a simple country lassie, and you wore a short white dress and a sunbonnet, and you and some others played ring-around-rosy. That certainly gave me one laugh. Mazie Kane in a sunbonnet and playing ring-around-rosy with a lot of other criminals. Eh, what!"

Miss Kane smiled and then shook her head at the thought of the fearful deeds true art sometimes imposes on the hard-working actress.

"What a troupe," she sighed, "what a troupe! That was the worst bunch of girls I ever saw gathered together. Why, when a gentleman friend asked me to make up a party for supper, I was actually ashamed. There wasn't a girl in the crowd I was sure had a decent dress to wear, or wouldn't take away a few forks or spoons for souvenirs."

"Wasn't Teddy Marlowe in that show," Belle Gordon asked, "and Edith Carlton?"

"That's right," Miss Kane admitted, "but you wouldn't want to introduce Edith to anybody over seventeen and Teddy Marlowe didn't know how to treat men of any age."

"She's been married twice that I know of," Miss Gordon suggested.

"That's all right," Miss Kane admitted a little wearily, "but, believe me, Teddy lacks experience. And then Teddy was educated very much above her natural vulgarity, and that's an awful thing to happen to any girl."

For three hours Fay sipped her champagne and in silence listened to the other girls discussing their women and men friends. Most of the talk appealed to her as being very dull, a very little that was amusing, and much more that was vulgar. But the

lights, and the music of the orchestra, and the noise and laughter of the crowded room appealed to her very strongly, and she was really glad to be there, surrounded by so much exhilaration, and not alone in her room at the hotel. Several times she wondered what Fielding would have thought of it, and in her heart she was glad that he was not there.

Once she remembered the advice that Doris Yorke had given her, not to ally herself with Belle Gordon or her crowd unless she wanted to be identified as one of them, and for a brief moment she was annoyed at the thought that she had disregarded her friend's kindly warning. It was not until she was on her way back to the hotel in the automobile that she thoroughly realized, and the realization came to her then with great force, that the other members of the company in the restaurant who had seen her would, no doubt, always connect her with that particular set of girls.

When Fay awoke the next morning the sun was streaming into her room, and she found that it was past ten o'clock. There was to be a general rehearsal at eleven and so she dressed hurriedly and went down-stairs to her breakfast. It had always

been her custom to arise early, and now she was conscious of a guilty feeling at the loss of these morning hours that had always appealed to her as the best of the day. Besides this, she was unused to late suppers, her head ached, her limbs were tired, and all her accustomed energy, physical and mental, seemed to have gone, and left her exhausted and depressed. On her way to the theater she decided that no supper-party was worth her present condition, and now that she was away from the lights, and music, and the excitement of the crowd, she realized that the supper had not been very gay but rather dull. Fay was also keenly conscious of the feeling that she had not been bored by the vapid talk and the suggestive remarks of her companions and that it would have been much more to her credit if she had not only been bored but wholly disgusted. She found, however, a certain balm for her self-accusing thoughts in the argument that she had gained a knowledge of her fellow-workers and their friends which could have been acquired by experience and by experience only.

In any case, she determined that she had been to her last supper-party, at least as far as the week at Atlantic City was concerned. Hereafter, however

lonesome it might be, she would at once return to her hotel as soon as the performance was over, and thus keep herself in condition for her work and the all-important opening in New York. On that night she had already arranged to take supper with Fielding. They were to celebrate her metropolitan début, and it was to be a real celebration—that is, as far as Fielding's purse would permit. But at that supper there would be no one but themselves, and in no way would it resemble the heavy eating, heavy drinking, riotous affair of the night previous.

For the first time, the rehearsal that morning did not amuse Fay, and she was delighted when it was over and she could get out of the warm theater into the sunshine and enjoy the cool breezes from the sea. With several other girls from the company she went at once for a bath in the ocean, and after an hour spent in the water and lying about on the hot sand, she felt much better and almost free from the effects of the supper-party.

Late that afternoon she started out for a walk by herself, but at the door of the hotel she met Belle Gordon and several of the men who had been at the supper the night before. They insisted on her joining them, and for the next two hours she idled

away her time at the shooting-galleries, the moving-picture shows, the booths of the palm-readers, and at various of the other catch-penny devices of the board-walk. Like herself, Miss Gordon and her men friends seemed much refreshed by the sea air and Fay found their society vastly more amusing than being alone with her own thoughts. If the men were at times a little boisterous and free in their manner toward her they actually did or said nothing to which she could object, and when they insisted on her joining them again at supper that night there seemed to be no legitimate excuse for a refusal. This was "the road" and she had been told that on the road "everything went," and she had also been told that if a girl held herself aloof from her fellow-players she would at once lose standing in the company and that unpopularity was the most hopeless of all barriers to success. When she was back in New York, she argued to herself, it would be different. Then it would be easy enough to be friendly with the girls of the company at the theater, but when she was away from it she could see as little or as much of them as she chose.

Thus it was that Fay cleared away any regrets that she may have had at being identified with Belle

Gordon and her set of girls, as well as the men who placed their automobiles at their service and were forever ready to play host. There was, she easily convinced herself, plenty of time to go back to her old standards when she had returned to town, and to the simple inexpensive hospitality of Porter Fielding.

It was during this same week, when Fay was enjoying the early fruits of her stage success, that Fielding, too, scored his first victory. On Thursday afternoon David Wilmerding telephoned him at Lusk Brothers that he would like to have him dine with him that night at his house, and Fielding, of course, accepted with alacrity. He rather imagined that Blanche Wilmerding must have come to town for the night and that it was to her that he was really indebted for the invitation. But when he had been shown into the drawing-room of the big home on Madison Avenue he found Mr. Wilmerding waiting for him alone.

It was the first time that Fielding had been at the house, and although much of the furniture was concealed in its summer covers, he was deeply impressed by the size of the rooms, the polished floors, and the wonderful paintings that hung against the

silk brocaded walls. After his life at cheap restaurants, the snowy linen of the dinner-table, the heavy silver, the row of thin gilt-edged glasses before his plate, the shaded candles, and the great bowl of roses in the center, appealed to him greatly. As he glanced about the dining-room, at the mahogany sideboards covered with massive silver plate, at the rich hangings, and the lace curtains, gently stirred by the evening breeze, Fielding was immensely pleased to be in such surroundings, and he made no effort to conceal his delight.

"It's quite wonderful," he exclaimed with the most sincere frankness.

His elderly host smiled and from across the table raised his glass of sherry to him. "I'm glad you like it," he said heartily. "I hope that this is only the first of many dinners we shall have together."

During the dinner, the conversation drifted in various directions from the news of the town to the quiet life of Pleasantville and then back again to the doings of the day on Wall Street. It was not until the coffee had been served and the servants had left the room that Fielding learned just why he had been asked to dinner. For a few moments the two men

puffed silently on their cigars, and then Mr. Wilmerding pushed his chair back from the table, crossed his legs, and began.

"Porter," he said, "I hope you don't mind my calling you Porter; I wanted to talk to you about your work down-town. Are you satisfied?"

Fielding looked at his host a little confused. "Why, yes. I think it's a wonderful business. That is, I'm sure it is, if I could once get a working knowledge of it. You see, as yet, I'm only learning the rudiments."

Wilmerding nodded. "That's it, that's why I wanted to talk to you now, before you had learned the rudiments. I mean the rudiments of the business as practised by a firm like Lusk Brothers."

Fielding looked at his host and smiled. "You mean you don't like Lusk Brothers."

The older man rolled his cigar slowly between his lips.

"That's about it," he said. "If you don't know it already, Fielding, you'll soon learn that there are as many brands of brokers as there are of whiskey. I've always known the Lusks in a business way, but it's only a week ago that I took the trouble

to find out anything about them, especially Max Lusk, outside of business. Porter, he's a bad lot, believe me, a thoroughly bad lot."

Fielding looked at Wilmerding with serious questioning eyes.

"I'm sorry to hear you say it. He's always been extremely kind to me, and I can't forget that he gave me my chance to come to New York."

Wilmerding pushed his chair farther from the table and smiled pleasantly at his guest's serious face.

"As far as I know," he said, "there are three reasons why brokerage firms take young men into their employ. The young men are either relatives who must be taken care of, or have rich fathers who put money into the business, or influential social connections through which they are expected to obtain valuable accounts. To be quite frank with you, Fielding, I can't see how you come under any of these heads. You're surely not a relative of Max Lusk, you haven't rich parents and, as yet, at least as far as I know, and if you will allow me to be quite frank, you have no social connections of any particular value. And, what's more important, you never will have as long as you are in the employ of

the Lusk Brothers, and Max Lusk knows that as well as I do. Now, if you don't mind telling me, why do you think he voluntarily asked you to come into his office? It would be very interesting to know, very."

"I have always thought," Fielding said, "that it was from sheer kindness. I certainly know of no other reason."

Wilmerding smiled genially at his youthful guest and shook his head.

"The Lusks have never been conspicuous for their philanthropy, believe me. But, Porter, I'm not like some men who muck-rake just for the fun of stirring up the muck. When I do dig up an evil I try to suggest a remedy, and the remedy in this case is that you quit Lusk Brothers and come with us."

Fielding looked steadily across the table into the smiling eyes of his host, and while his gratitude was easily evident he found it impossible, for the moment, to find the words with which to express adequately the full extent of his feelings.

"It's only fair to speak to you now," Wilmerding went on, "of what no doubt you are already well aware. We are a very conservative house and

while we will pay you as much as you receive at present, I doubt very much if your finances will increase with the same leaps and bounds that they might with Lusk Brothers. But, mind you, I say 'might'."

"Oh, it isn't the money I care for," Fielding protested eagerly. "It's the chance I'm thinking about. I certainly don't pretend to know much about Wall Street, but I do know just how much it means for a young man to be connected with a house like yours. Really, Mr. Wilmerding, I don't know why you should do it."

The old man took his cigar out of his mouth and smiled grimly at the ashes. "I do. Because I like you, and I hate to see a young man with a clean record, and a good golfer to boot, go to the devil surely in a business way and probably in a social way as well. Why, even Blanche sized up Lusk when she saw him on the links at Pleasantville. It was she who first warned me."

"I don't know," Fielding said, "how I can ever thank you or her."

Wilmerding pushed his chair from the table and got up.

"Then don't try," he said. "Break away from

the Lusks as soon as you can. Then take a Turkish bath, get thoroughly sterilized, and come down to see me. And now, if you'll pardon me, I'm going to send you home, as I've got a lot of papers to look over before I get to bed."

The two men shook hands warmly, and Fielding made a final effort to express his gratitude.

"And, oh, Porter," Wilmerding said, "I'd almost forgotten. Blanche is coming to town on Monday and she wants you to go to the theater that night and to supper afterward. Said she would arrive in town too late to dine comfortably, so it would be better to take supper at the Knickerbocker. It seems that that Miss Clayton from Pleasantville is going to make her first appearance and Blanche wants to see her. She was a friend of yours, too, wasn't she?"

"Yes," Fielding said, "a great friend. We grew up together."

And then for a moment he hesitated and stood irresolute, not knowing what he should say further. Monday night was to have been the night of *the* supper-party, when he and Fay were to have gone out to celebrate alone, to talk over the success of the play, and of Fay's success, too. He knew how she had

planned and looked forward to it, but in the face of Mr. Wilmerding's wonderful business offer it seemed impossible now to refuse his invitation.

"Well," Wilmerding asked briefly, "that'll be all right about the theater and supper on Monday? I'll tell Blanche it's all fixed, eh?"

Fielding nodded and backed slowly toward the door. It really seemed as if there was no alternative. "Yes, of course," he said, "and thank you and Miss Wilmerding so much. I'll be delighted to go."

"That's fine," said the broker, "and once more good night to you."

As soon as Fielding had reached his rooms he wrote a long letter to Fay, telling her of Wilmerding's offer, how great a promotion it meant to him in every way, and how, with the attention he purposed giving to his work, an honorable and enviable position in the business world was now practically assured to him for life. He dwelt at length on the fact that his first thought had been to write to her of his success because he knew that she, more than any one else, had his welfare at heart, and because he wanted her to be the first to congratulate him on his new-found happiness. At the end of the letter he told her of his acceptance of Wilmerding's

invitation to go to the opening performance of *The Belles of Barbary* and to a supper-party afterward, and, how, under the circumstances, he was sure that she would understand how ungracious, even impossible, it would have been to have refused the invitation.

"There will be so many nights," he wrote, "when we can have little suppers and celebrate our dual conquests of New York that I know you will feel that I did the right thing about Monday evening. It seems such a pity after all our plans, but I am sure that you will appreciate the difficulty of my position, and that you will be as generous as you always have been, Fay, dear, and will as usual forgive your friend—Porter."

He mailed the letter that night so that Fay should receive it at the earliest moment possible, and then, satisfied with having done what he considered the right and only proper thing under the circumstances, he went to bed and to sleep, happy and content in the thought that success was within his grasp.

When Fielding arrived at his office the next morning, it was with some slight feeling of trepidation that he asked for a few minutes' private conversation with Max Lusk. He could not well ignore the fact that it was Lusk who had given him

his opportunity to come to New York, and had since that time treated him with every mark of favor and the greatest consideration. Now, long before he had had an opportunity to pay off even a tithe of this debt, and certainly for no adequate reason that he could give, he was leaving the employ of this man who had so befriended him. In his little glass office Lusk listened to Fielding's story, and considerably to the latter's surprise, was apparently not in the least perturbed or hurt at the young man's news, but, to the contrary, heartily congratulated him on his change of employers.

He slapped Fielding genially on the knee and his putty features were wreathed in smiles.

"Fine," he cried, "fine! To get into that firm is like having Wall Street pin its legion of honor on your chest. Personally, I consider it a great distinction to have Wilmerding think well enough of one of our young men to take him from us. Finish your work up here and leave just as soon as you are ready. Porter, my boy, you're in luck and I congratulate you."

The two men shook hands, and greatly relieved, Fielding hurried from the room. Once alone Lusk

chuckled audibly, shrugged his narrow shoulders, and sitting down at his desk, reached out for the telephone to resume his day's work. Fielding had served the little broker's purpose, for he was the direct means of bringing Fay Clayton to New York, and now that he could be of no further use to him, Lusk was only too delighted to be rid of him.

It was late on that same Friday afternoon when Fay returned from rehearsal and found Fielding's letter waiting for her at the hotel. She took it to her room and tore off the envelope with the same little thrill of pleasure with which she always opened one of Porter's notes. As she read of the news of Mr. Wilmerding's offer her eyes shone with the real pleasure and pride that was in her heart, but when she came to the part about the supper-party the smile on her lips and in her eyes vanished as quickly as it had come. Involuntarily her fingers tightened about the letter, and she crushed it in the palm of her hand. Her face turned slowly scarlet and tears of humiliation filled her eyes. That night was to have been *her* night, and she could not understand how any conditions could exist that would induce Fielding to beg off. Together they had

planned for it for days, and she had been looking forward to the night as the happiest of their many little celebrations.

Although she would not admit it, even to herself, the real cause of her distress, of course, lay deeper than the mere postponing of their supper-party. The effect of the whole letter on Fay was that Fielding had permanently allied himself with the Wilmerdings, and it would have been more than human if she could have had any particular liking for Blanche Wilmerding. Whether he really cared for the girl or was only attracted by her position and her money, or whether Blanche cared for him, Fay had never known. But the facts disclosed in Porter's letter certainly seemed to show that the girl was interested in Fielding and his career. Indignant and miserable as she was, Fay at once made two sincere efforts to write Fielding her congratulations on his new position, but both attempts were absolute failures and she destroyed the letters. Glancing at the clock, she found that there was still half an hour before her dinner-time and at once decided to take a short walk and send Fielding a telegram of congratulation and good wishes. It seemed the easiest way out of her

troubles—the telegram would reach him that same night, and when she saw him she would be in a mood better calculated to conceal her real feelings.

She went to the telegraph office, and having sent her message, started on a brisk walk to the hotel. Heedless of the passing crowds on the board-walk, her mind still full of Fielding and his letter, she hurried on until she became conscious that some one was following her and calling her by name. Turning quickly, she saw the smiling eager face of Max Lusk. It was the first time that she had met him since the miserable scene in the apartment-house, and her first instinct was to turn and run away from him as she had then, but there was something in the look and in the cringing attitude of the man that made her hesitate. With his hat in hand he bowed low before her.

"I have come to ask your forgiveness," he said with a great show of humility. "I couldn't stand it any longer, Miss Clayton—indeed, I couldn't. Won't you believe me?"

Had her mind been less perturbed than it was at that time, it is probable that she would have resented his daring to approach her at all. But in the con-

fusion of the moment and from the very unexpectedness of his appearance, almost unconsciously, she held out her hand to him.

Lusk took her hand in both of his, and so low did he bend over, that his lips almost touched her glove. His whole manner was so penitent, even pathetic, that Fay's first flush of indignation gave way to one of pity.

"I've been thinking of nothing else for days," he protested. "This morning I felt as if I couldn't stand it any longer so I came down to see if you wouldn't forgive me. Please try to forget it, and let's start again. Won't you?"

For a few moments Fay stood looking out at the sea, apparently unconscious that she was not alone. In her heart she had no faith in Lusk or his protestations, but during the last month, owing to the women with whom she had associated, her standards, especially in regard to men, had undergone a great change. She disliked Max Lusk and she distrusted him, but she was also afraid of him. Even in her brief experience of theatrical life she had learned of several authentic cases of girls who had lost their positions through the influence of men like this one. Suddenly she turned and nodded to him,

but her lips were drawn tight and there was no smile in her eyes.

"Why, that's all right," she said. "Yes, let's forget it."

Lusk's face beamed, and he clapped his hands together. "Good," he cried, "that's fine! And now that it's all settled, mayn't I walk back to the hotel with you?"

But Fay shook her head, "Not if you don't mind," she said decisively. "I'd rather be alone just now."

With the belief that his chance meeting with the girl was the only cause for her evidently nervous state of mind, Lusk smiled his apologies.

"Perhaps I could see you at supper," he ventured.

"I'm afraid not; you see, I've already promised some of the girls to go out with them."

The broker gloomily shook his head.

"That's too bad, because I've got to go back to town to-morrow morning. It's one of those engagements that can't be broken." And then he seemed to have a happy inspiration, and his face was no longer clouded in gloom.

"But how about Monday night in town?" he asked. "A fine supper to celebrate your first night as a Broadway favorite! What do you say?"

At the suggestion Fay's lips broke into the mere suggestion of a smile.

"It's funny you should have asked me that," she said, "and just at this time."

"Funny," he repeated, "why funny?"

"Oh, I don't know."

"But you will let me give you the supper," he urged.

For a brief moment Fay hesitated, and then shrugged her shoulders and nodded her assent.

"Of course," she said, "I'll be glad to go to supper with you Monday night."

"Where shall we have it," he asked, now thoroughly alert and delighted with the prospect; "and do you want it in a private room or the restaurant; and whom shall I invite? Of course, you'll want Porter and—"

"I think Porter has an engagement that night," she interrupted him, "I'm sure he has. Ask anybody, and have it any place you like, Mr. Lusk. It's all the same to me. You can send me word to the theater."

She smiled in a perfunctory sort of way and held out her hand. Even Lusk noticed how tired and miserable she looked.

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"Good-by, then," he said, "until Monday."

"Until Monday," she repeated. "It's very good of you to give me a party. I must hurry back to the hotel now. Good-by."

CHAPTER VII

THE BELLES OF BARBARY was the first important offering of the new season, and the big theater was crowded with the kind of audience that is always gathered together at this time of the year. The eight boxes were filled by the families of leading managers, or by women stars who had not yet opened their season and who came to be seen and to see their fellow-artists at work. Regarding the event as a great social occasion, the lady stars had arrayed themselves in their most gorgeous raiment, and the wives of the managers, as representatives of the commercial side of the drama, were equally conspicuous in the brilliancy of their plumage.

The front rows were filled by men who were either particular friends of the manager of the theater, or who were willing to pay exorbitant prices to the speculators for such choice seats. Back of these sat the critics, gloomy and terribly conscious of their own importance, and, still farther back, the men and

women who seem to live only for first nights and who just manage to exist somehow somewhere during the intervals. Young men with long hair, accompanied by ladies with wonderful coiffures and gold eye-glasses; embryo playwrights, professional playwrights, rival managers, theatrical lawyers, wine-agents, play producers, music publishers; show-girls, still rehearsing and whose men friends were sufficiently generous to provide them with expensive seats; play brokers, song-writers, costumers, wig-makers, hair-dressers, hotel managers, composers and librettists—all of the men and women who are more or less dependent on the theater and its people and whose bank accounts are directly affected by the success or failure of any new play.

The greater part of the audience gathered early in the lobbies, the men discussing the rumors of the success of the various artists in the musical comedy during its week at Atlantic City, and the women making mental notes and exchanging caustic or complimentary remarks concerning the costumes of the new arrivals. It was a crowd which had come to be seen as well as to see: the men for the greater part on business bent, serious and know-

ing; the women conspicuous for their extravagant head-dress, their bizarre and inappropriate raiment, the great amount of perfume that they exuded and that soon permeated the entire theater. Max Lusk and two of his male cronies sat in the front row, but Wilmerding, less wise in the secrets of how to obtain the best places for a Broadway première, had bought seats for his party much farther back in the orchestra.

If the exceedingly encouraging reports of the new musical comedy had given a more than usually joyous and hopeful air to the assembled audience, there was no such spirit evident back of the curtain. Ben Tolliver, the manager, Morley, the producer, and the actors and actresses who were to play the principal parts, and whom Fay had seen laughing and joking behind the scenes at Atlantic City, had suddenly become terribly serious. Now every one seemed nervous and irritable and to have lost their confidence and all hope of success.

Fay had gone to the theater early, and having dressed for the first act, went down on the dimly-lighted stage. The scene was already set and ready, the properties were laid out on long tables; nowhere was there any sign of confusion, but rather the

superlative orderliness of the deck of a man-of-war. The whole atmosphere of the place seemed to Fay tense and unnecessary and quite unbearable; groups of actors stood about in corners of the stage, silent and gloomy, and even the "grips" appeared depressed and apparently hopeless of the outcome. That this same stage would in a few minutes be the scene of a riot of brilliant color and music and pretty women seemed to Fay hardly possible, and tired of the silence and pall that hung over the place, she hurried back to the more congenial atmosphere of the big dressing-room that had been set apart for the use of the show-girls.

Here there was laughter and endless chatter and an absolute lack of any feeling of responsibility whatever. No gloomy doubts assailed the cheerful outlook of these charming ladies. Whether the play was a success or a failure they were, at least, sure of their salaries for a few weeks, and in any case, they were back in the big town, at home in their cozy flats, and surrounded by the kind friends who would send them flowers and give them an endless round of dinners and supper-parties.

Fay did not leave the room until she was called with the others for their first entrance. Carefully

holding up her dress, she went down the dusty narrow spiral staircase to the now brilliantly lighted stage and found that since her last visit a great transformation had taken place. The radiance of a thousand electric globes seemed to have dispelled completely the former foreboding gloom. The silent pall that had hung over the place had given way to an atmosphere of keen exhilaration. On the stage proper the soubrette and the second comedian were taking their third encore for a song and dance which at Atlantic City had never won more than one; everywhere she looked, about the broad spaces, behind the scenes, there were groups of smiling, gaily dressed chorus girls; the principals of the company, now apparently sure of a success, were gathered about the entrances ready to go on or waiting to congratulate their fellow-workers as they left the stage. Even the usually hard-set features of Ben Tolliver were wreathed in smiles as he stood in the prompt entrance directing the performance. The play was going as it had never gone before, and the very air seemed charged with success.

At last it came Fay's turn, and she and the other seven show-girls, with their wonderful dresses and

flaring hats, and carrying long-handled parasols, followed the prima donna slowly down the stage. Belle Gordon, who was next to Fay, turned and smiled to her encouragingly.

"Don't be scared, Fay," she whispered, "it's just like Atlantic City."

But, as a matter of fact, Fay was not at all frightened. Her eyes once accustomed to the glare of the footlights, she found that Belle Gordon was right and that as far as she was concerned a Broadway stage was just like the stage at Atlantic City. There was the prima donna singing the opening bars of her song, precisely as she had always sung them, and beyond her were the footlights and the musical director, with his white kid gloves and gold-rimmed spectacles, and beyond him, rows of black coats and broad shirt-fronts, relieved at intervals by the brilliant color of a woman's dress.

The blurred rows of faces gradually cleared, and she saw the smiling features of Max Lusk. She did not smile back at him, but looked quickly away to another part of the house. But wherever she looked, whether it was at the men in the front rows or at the overdressed women in the boxes, she found

that they were looking at her, and smiling at her, as if to say, "My, but you're a very pretty girl, and we're glad to see you on Broadway."

Several times during the play she looked for Fielding, but could not find him. It was the one disappointment of the evening, but she was confident that he was in the theater and her secret hope was that he, too, would think her as pretty as the others thought her. His words of praise were the only ones she really cared to hear, and over and over again, when she was on the stage and in her dressing-room, it was with a sharp pang of regret that she remembered that she could not see him until the following day. The bitterness that she had felt toward him when she had received his letter at Atlantic City was gone by now and all she cared for was to be near him, to have him tell her that he thought her much the prettiest girl on the stage, and that he cared for her more than Blanche Wilmerding or any one else in the whole world.

The Belles of Barbary continued on its joyous way, and the first performance ended in a triumph with glory enough for every one concerned. The audience filed slowly out of the theater, happy in the thought that there was at least one theater in

town where for many months one could hear pretty music, laugh at good comedy, and watch beautiful girls cavort or move majestically about the stage. Behind the scenes every one was happy because a long season on Broadway and the accompanying comforts and luxuries of New York were an assured fact.

When the curtain had fallen, innumerable telegrams of good wishes and boxes of flowers were given out by the stage doorkeeper to almost every member of the company. To Fay's lot fell a telegram from Doris Yorke, and two bunches of flowers—one of roses from Fielding, and a great bouquet of orchids from Lusk. The big dressing-room of the show-girls looked like a flower-shop at Easter time, but Lusk's was easily the most conspicuous offering of all, and was enormously admired by the other girls. But it was Fielding's roses and the telegram from Doris that most appealed to Fay. The orchids only served to remind her that the automobile of the donor was waiting for her at the stage door, ready to carry her off to a supper-party that she in no way fancied. Her thoughts were all of Fielding and the little supper they had planned and she now thoroughly regretted the sudden impulse

that had prompted her to accept Lusk's invitation to the party that he was giving in her honor.

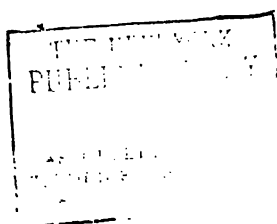
As Belle Gordon had also been asked, the two girls went together in Lusk's car and met their host and his other guests in the lobby of the Knickerbocker where he had decided to give the supper. A large table had been reserved for him in the Armenonville room, just inside one of the windows leading to the terrace, and it was therefore necessary for his party to traverse almost the entire length of the restaurant.

The place was crowded with people who had been to see the new play and most of them were half through their supper when Lusk and his friends made their entrance. In all ways it was just as the little broker would have planned it—the orchestra was playing the song hit from *The Belles of Barbary*, the men and women that filled the room to overflowing were already enjoying the exhilarating effects of good food and good drink, and were extremely happy in the consciousness of having witnessed a real success. And what meant much more to Max Lusk, Fay looked quite superb. She wore the only good evening dress she owned, a simple white tulle, but it showed off her tall lithe figure to wonderful



When she saw Fielding sitting at a table a few feet away.

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advantage. And as she followed Lusk slowly along the aisles, formed by the crowded tables, few failed to recognize the red-haired show-girl who had been the chief topic of gossip between the acts of *The Belles of Barbary*.

Bowing to the right and left, and fairly beaming with satisfaction over a guest whose beauty attracted such universal attention and admiration, Lusk proudly led the way across the restaurant. And, to many there, the mystery, which during the early part of the evening had existed concerning the exact social and moral status of the new show-girl, had been definitely solved. To the seasoned eyes of these men and women of Broadway seeing is believing, and they saw Fay Clayton with Max Lusk, and they saw that Belle Gordon and several more of her luxurious type of show-girl were members of the same party, and they therefore believed.

It was just as Fay was about to take her place at Lusk's right that she first saw the Wilmerdings and Fielding sitting at a table but a few feet away. At the moment Blanche Wilmerding was speaking to her father, but Fielding's eyes were riveted on Fay. She had not seen him since she had gone away, more than a week before, and her first im-

pulse was to take the few steps that separated them and to tell him how happy she was to see him again, but there was something in his look that made this simple show of friendliness impossible. Fielding's lips were drawn into a straight hard line, and there was no smile of welcome as he recognized Fay's greeting by a formal bow. If Wilmerding or his daughter, both of whom she knew slightly, were conscious of her presence they did not show it then or afterward. With a sharp little gasp of wonder and pain, she sank into her chair and quickly turned toward the man sitting on her right so that her face was hidden from Wilmerding's table. To Fay the room became suddenly unbearably oppressive, the pink candle-shades and the roses on the table seemed to be moving slowly up and down before her straining eyes, her lips were parched, and the pleasantries she tried to speak died in her throat. The man on her right regarded her with evident alarm.

"I'm afraid you're a little faint," he said. "You'd better drink this," and he pushed a glass of water toward her. She did as she was bid, and in a few minutes more she had found herself again, and went on talking to her fellow-guest, as if nothing had happened.

Instead of being the happiest night of Fay's life, as she had so carefully planned that it should be, it turned out, in reality, to be the most miserable that she had ever known. As the long supper dragged on its weary way of cheap wit and sordid gossip she found herself constantly casting secret glances at the men and women of her own party, and then comparing them and their manners and their clothes with the people at the other tables. As far as she could see, there was little difference, except the women at Lusk's table were perhaps a little overdressed, and at times, especially as the hour grew late, the men laughed loudly and seemed to want to make themselves conspicuous. Several times, almost against her will, she glanced at the Wilmerdings' table, but it always so happened that Fielding was talking to Miss Wilmerding, and when they started to leave the restaurant Fay quickly turned her head and talked with much animation to one of her own party.

But at last, and greatly to Fay's relief, the supper came to an end, and Lusk took her and Belle Gordon home in his car. They dropped Miss Gordon at her apartment and Fay found herself alone with Lusk. The long evening of anxiety and excitement had be-

gun to tell on her and she sank back wearily into the corner of the limousine, her eyes closed, and her head resting against the cushions.

"I'm afraid you're very tired," Lusk said with great solicitude.

"Very," she said; "the performance was a good deal of a strain, but that's over at last, thank heaven! I'm mighty glad I can never make another first appearance on Broadway."

Lusk smiled at her and gave her a fatherly pat on her gloved hand.

"I tell you you were wonderful, Miss Clayton, wonderful! You ought to have heard how the men raved about you between the acts. I was mighty proud of my protégé, mighty proud, believe me!"

Fay closed her eyes, and with a slight shudder, sank farther back into the cushions. She wanted so much to be silent, but Lusk insisted on talking ceaselessly.

"Did you see Porter at supper?" he ran on. "You know he has left us and gone with old man Wilmerding. A rare chance for a boy! And that Miss Wilmerding's a fine gal, a fine gal, I can tell you."

Fay pulled herself slowly from the depths of the

cushions, and sitting on the edge of the seat, stared out of the open window on the long rows of gloomy foreboding houses flying by in the darkness.

"Yes," she said, "she's a fine girl."

"But not for me," Lusk chuckled, "not my kind at all. I like women who work for a living, who really do something with their lives, and who are clever enough to keep themselves before the public. What can you expect of a girl who has everything thrown at her all of her life, and for what—for nothing?"

"That's right," Fay said with a weary little sigh, "that girl's got everything—a home, and a father to look after her, and friends, and money—I'll bet she doesn't have to borrow from men."

Lusk stuck his hand deep in his trousers pocket, and pulling out a fat roll of bills, held it toward her.

"My dear Miss Clayton," he said, "if there's anything I can do—"

But Fay pushed the proffered hand sharply from her.

"Thank you, no," she whispered. "Please don't do that, please don't."

While she still spoke the automobile, to her great

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relief, swung around the corner of the cross-street on which the Yorkes lived and came to a sudden stop before their door.

Lusk helped her out of the car, and when they had reached the vestibule she shook hands with him and thanked him as graciously as she could for the supper-party and the orchids and for all of his kindnesses.

"You're sure there's nothing I can do," he ventured again, and, unabashed by the failure of his previous effort, his hand dove into his trousers pocket.

"Nothing," Fay laughed, "nothing—not now, anyhow. Good night."

Lusk started to go, but before he had reached the car he called back to her.

"But don't forget, Miss Clayton, if you ever should need me, I'm your banker."

By way of answer, Fay waved her hand to him, and having let herself in the door, started to climb up the long flights of stairs to the Yorke apartment where she found Doris waiting for her in the sitting-room.

"Hello, Fay," Doris cried, "how was it? Did you get through all right, or did you fall down and

disgrace yourself? And how do you like the stage, now that you're a regular Broadway actress?"

Fay put out her arms, and resting them on the girl's shoulders, looked straight into her eyes.

"Doris," she said, "I can't tell you how sweet I think it was of you to wait up for me, but I'm going to bed. I'm just dead beat. The play was a great success, and they tell me I was a great success, and, I guess I was—that is as far as a show-girl can be a great success—and I hate the stage, and I hate everybody connected with the stage, directly or indirectly, and that includes myself."

Doris laughed aloud, slipped her shoulders free from Fay's hands, and started for her bedroom. When she had reached the door she turned and kissed her hand to the gloomy bent figure standing in the center of the room.

"Of course, you're right, dear," she called, "but I'm sorry you found it out so soon. Show business is a rotten business, sure. Good night."

Fay had returned from Atlantic City on Sunday afternoon, but as she had a dress rehearsal that evening and many little things to attend to before the opening, she and Fielding had agreed that it

would be better not to try to see each other before Tuesday afternoon, when she was to come to his rooms for tea. Their chance meeting on Monday night at the restaurant had been a contingency that neither of them had considered.

As was his custom, he met her at the door of his apartment, but apparently not noticing the hand of welcome he held out to her, she crossed the room and sat down in her favorite armchair before the empty fireplace. Fielding carefully closed the door and then went over to the hearth, and leaning against the mantel, looked down at Fay's white face and colorless lips.

"What's the trouble, Fay?" he asked. "Tell me, won't you, please?"

But Fay disregarded his question, and for a few moments nervously ran her long tapering fingers up and down the arms of the chair.

"I thought at first," she began, "that it would be better if I didn't come to see you at all to-day, but afterward it seemed wiser for me to come and have a little talk with you. It seemed fairer to both of us, and I want very much to be fair with you, Porter."

Fielding clasped his hands behind his back and slowly shook his head.

"I'm afraid I don't understand you," he said. "I'm afraid I don't understand you at all."

"That seems a pity, too," Fay went on. "Why were you ashamed to speak to me last night? Was it me or my friends of whom you were ashamed?"

Fielding smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

"I didn't care much about some of your friends—that's a fact."

"A week ago," Fay said, "you were glad enough to know Max Lusk, and to take his money. Can a few days with Wilmerding & Wilson have changed your views so entirely?"

"It wasn't the men," Fielding replied quickly, "it was the women. Fay, you have no right to expect me to go from a girl like Blanche Wilmerding and speak to some of the women who were at your table. I don't know much about the ways of the world, but I know that much. Won't you take off your hat? You look as if you were going to run away at once. Better have some tea."

For several moments Fay did not answer, but pressed the back of her hand hard against her fore-

head. "I can't stay very long," she said at last. "I played around with those girls in Atlantic City because I had no excuse to offer them for staying away from their parties. It's very difficult to be with those women so much at the theater and not be civil to them—even friendly. But, at that, I'd quite decided to cut them out altogether—that is, when I came back to New York. And then I got your letter, and when I found that you had thrown me down for the Wilmerdings, I suppose I sort of lost my head. Lusk turned up—I met him that same afternoon on the board-walk—and I said I would go to supper with him last night. I didn't know who he was going to have, but I was sorry afterward I hadn't refused, because I don't like him very much. But after I got your letter I was pretty badly broken up and I hardly knew what I was doing. You hurt me terribly, Porter, terribly. I'd looked forward so much to that supper with you."

Fielding walked over to her side and laid his hand gently on her shoulder. "I'm so sorry, Fay," he said, "so very sorry, but I thought—"

"Won't you go back," Fay interrupted him, "and stand where you were? I can talk to you so much better when you are over there. I've been thinking

it all out to-day, and I must tell you now before we quit."

"Quit!" he repeated.

"Yes, quit," she went on. "You see, Porter, just a few weeks ago—it seems such a terribly short time now, doesn't it?—we were down there at Pleasantville and things were pretty much the same with us. We were poor, and didn't have really much but each other, and then we both of us got our chance, and we came on here to seek our fortunes, in a way, didn't we? And although that's such a very short time ago, just look at the difference. You're a success already, Porter, and—"

"Everybody was talking about you last night, Fay," he said; "why, all the people near us spoke of you. They thought you were wonderful."

"I know that," she said, "I know that. I know I looked pretty, but I didn't care what any one else thought. I wanted to look pretty to you. I'd tried so hard to look my best, and to learn the steps, and I worked and worked at rehearsals with the one thought always in my mind—that you would be proud of me. And—and then when it was all over, and they said that I had done all right, and looked so pretty, and I got your roses, and was very pleased

and happy—then you refused to speak to me in a restaurant.”

She turned, and hiding her face against the cushions of the chair, broke into a series of long low sobs. Fielding came and knelt by her side and put his arms about her shoulders.

“Forgive me, Fay,” he begged, “please forgive me. Please, Fay, dear, give me another chance.”

But the girl motioned him away, and, in a few moments, pulled herself to her feet, and then took several quick turns up and down the length of the room.

“I tell you, Porter,” she began again, “I tell you it’s over. It was nobody’s fault. You didn’t know, and I didn’t know, what this coming to New York meant to either of us. But now we know and the luck, as usual, is with the man. You’re in right, and I’m in wrong. If I had a home to go back to I’d go back to it to-day, but I have no home. I’m on my own feet—I’m alone. I wanted to make something of myself, and look where I’ve landed—look at my friends. You’re right, I know what they are. Even if my morals are different from those of the girls you saw me with last night, it’s the job that counts—it isn’t the individual. I’m just as much an

outcast from decent society as they are. If I were a shop-girl, or a stenographer, or anything else pretty much, I could hold up my head, but because I'm a show-girl I'm supposed to be bad, plain bad. Why, the very name is tainted."

"Fay, dear," Fielding said assuringly, "you're nervous and excited from overwork, and you've got your relative values badly mixed. To-night we're going to have our little supper-party, and talk it all over quietly. I'll meet you at the stage door after the performance."

Fay went to the mirror that hung over the fireplace, dried her wet eyes with her handkerchief, and rearranged her hair. Then she turned to Fielding, looked frankly into his eyes, and held out her hand.

"Thank you, Porter," she said, and her voice was quite calm again. "I appreciate your asking me, but I can't go—you must understand that. It wouldn't do for you in your present position to be seen supping alone with a show-girl. I'll come back here sometimes just to see how you are getting on, but the old days are over. You see, the trouble was that we were coming to the crossroads all the time and we didn't know it." She drew her hand from his and forced a smile into her tired misty eyes.

"Good-by to you, Porter," she went on, "and God bless you, and good luck to you. Don't try to see me for a while, anyhow, and don't write to me—it's better that way. I want to think things over and have time to forget about—about last night."

He suddenly held out his arms and took a step toward her, but she motioned him back.

"Please don't," she whispered, "please don't touch me, Porter. You've got to make it as easy for me as you can. Because, you see, you're a man and I'm only a woman, and—and I loved you, Porter—oh, good God, how I loved you!"

In silent acquiescence to her wishes, Fielding bowed low before her, and Fay, her arm shielding her face, and with unsteady steps, groped her way out of the room and down the stairs.

Had this interview with Fay taken place at almost any other time it would, no doubt, have made a much more serious and lasting impression on Fielding than it did. It occurred, however, at a moment when he was completely engrossed with his own affairs. He, therefore, chose to regard all that Fay had said as the ravings of a warm-hearted, very emotional girl who had just made her first appearance on the stage, and, in consequence, was still suf-

fering from an experience that Fielding was quite willing to believe was a most nerve-racking ordeal. Under the circumstances he deemed it best to accept her judgment in the matter and not to write to her or try to see her again until her nerves had been restored to their normal condition, and until she was ready to take a less morbid view of the future.

And there could be no question that he was immensely interested in his new position, and all that it meant to him now, and would mean to him hereafter. The great advantages in the change he had made had been evident at once. At no time were the offices of Lusk Brothers ever quite free from the spirit of gambling. The younger members of the firm, the clerks, even the office boys, were forever talking of "tips" and "good things", and trying to "pay expenses" for a Sunday jaunt or a present to a girl friend. Few came to invest, but many to speculate, and the marble brass-bound offices were in purpose not very different from the rooms of the casino at Monte Carlo. Even when the market was dullest there always seemed to be excitement here, and Fielding had but little liking for the everlasting din, the ceaseless confusion and the loud talk of the men who hung over the ticker from ten o'clock in

the morning until three in the afternoon, and lived only on their nerves and cocktails.

At the banking house of Wilmerding & Wilson, there was no confusion at all, but rather an atmosphere of great dignity that had been created by the traditions of years of solid prosperity. The worst panics known to Wall Street had left the big silent offices, with their solemn occupants, unruffled, and in times of great financial stress, the name of Wilmerding & Wilson had always been among those who, in the hour of imminent peril, came to save and never to destroy. Even Mr. Wilmerding found time to interest himself in Fielding's first duties and to see that he was properly started on his business career. The younger men in the office were most courteous and friendly in giving him such assistance as they could and it was not only at the office but rather outside of it that they showed their friendly spirit, by asking him to their clubs in town and to their homes in the country.

It was not, after all, very strange that Fielding should have at once come into a certain degree of popularity among these new acquaintances. He was quiet, intelligent, always courteous, had the manly good looks that appeal to both men and women,

was unusually good at outdoor sports, and, above all, was tremendously interested in anything and everything that happened to be going on. He was learning one of the best established facts in the social life of New York—that the unattached young man, attractive but poor, is always in demand, and gets ten invitations where the young man with a million dollars and a wife is fortunate if he gets one.

In all ways these were the best days that Fielding had ever known. He was happy in his work, happy in his friends, and the pleasure he found in this new life, crowded with its many interests, was only equaled by his surprise that it should have been made so easy for him, and that it should have come to him unasked or unsought. Indeed, it was probably the keen pleasure that he took in the hospitality that was held out to him, and his frank gratitude to his hosts, which, to a great extent, accounted for his popularity. The men and women of wealth and of socially conspicuous position, whom he had known heretofore only by hearsay or through the newspapers, and whom he had always held in a kind of awe, he found in reality to be more kindly and more simple in their thoughts and in their ways of living than the people, much less prominent, whom he

had known before. For the first time since he had come to New York he no longer felt the lack of wealth. These new friends seemed to be playing a game of give and take, and to be quite willing to accept his courtesy, and his good looks, and his golf and tennis as an entirely adequate contribution.

Of Fay he heard nothing, and saw but once. He had gone to a dinner and later to a theater-party to *The Belles of Barbary*, and from the back of the box, he had watched her throughout the evening whenever she was on the stage. She was quite as beautiful and, perhaps, even more graceful and charming in her manner than ever, but whether it was on account of the women in the box with him, or for some other reason, he found himself regarding her with new eyes. For the first time it did not seem possible to him that this girl on the stage, dressed in her gorgeous clothes, her lips and cheeks rouged, and her eyes smiling through penciled lashes, was the same girl whom he had known and grown up with at Pleasantville. Once, when she stood very near his box, he caught her eye and smiled and nodded to her, but she gave him no sign of recognition. During the remainder of the evening he found himself constantly wondering whether

it was because she was still angry with him, or because she was as morbid as she had been about herself, and conscious of the difference between her position in life and that of the woman with him in the box. He hoped and rather expected that she would call him up at his office the following morning, but this hope was not realized and he soon forgot the incident.

It was when he stopped long enough to look at her photographs in his room that he recalled the days when Fay had been nearly all of his life. There were other moments, too, when his thoughts turned back to her. Often when he was at a late dinner, surrounded by friends and all of the comforts and luxuries that money makes possible, he would suddenly remember that she was at work, parading up and down the stage, or changing her clothes in a hot stuffy dressing-room. At such moments he would make a mental vow that he would write to her the next day and seek her out, whether she wished it or not, and try to do something to make her life brighter, and to have her share the happiness that had come so suddenly and unexpectedly to him. But in the morning he would regard the affair with a calmer and what he assured himself was a saner

judgment. In the rush of other affairs, he would decide that it was better to leave matters as they stood, and to trust to the future to bring Fay and himself back to their old intimate terms of friendship.

If Fielding had been busily occupied during the month he had been at work in his new position, Fay, on her part, had done her best to try to forget the time when her happiness depended solely on him. For a few days after her last unhappy talk with Porter at his rooms she had refused invitations of every kind, had wandered about by herself, gloomy and depressed, and had not only spent the best part of her mornings and afternoons in the Yorke flat, but had returned there every night as soon as the performance was over. But the Yorke family no longer interested nor even amused her. Mrs. Yorke and Angie Clubb fought with each other incessantly, and both of them continued to browbeat Doris and old man Hooker. At last Fay could stand it no longer, and in self-defense she accepted almost any invitation that was offered her. She went to lunches with the girls of the company at the different Broadway restaurants, where, either by accident or previous arrangement, they usually met

some men who arrived in time for a liqueur and to pay the check. After the performance Fay usually had the choice of half a dozen supper-parties, and her time was often booked far ahead. She never returned to the flat now before two or three o'clock in the morning, sometimes much later, but, as she had become accustomed to sleeping until noon, it made little difference as far as her health was concerned.

It was after about two weeks of this sort of life when Doris came into Fay's room late one afternoon and asked her to go for a walk in the park. But Fay begged off with the excuse that she had to go down-town early to dine with some friends and to supper after the performance with the same crowd, and that the outlook was for a long hard night. Doris perched herself on Fay's trunk and for some moments carefully regarded the tips of her swinging shoes.

"Aren't you going it a little strong?" she asked at last. "I know that it's none of my business, Fay, but to keep up your present pace it seems as if you ought to get out into the air a little more. When I first knew you you used to take such a lot of exercise."

Fay went over to the window and beat a slow tattoo with her fingers on the window-pane.

"That's right, Doris," she said, "but I don't seem to have the time to take care of myself any more. So many parties, day and night, and so much sewing and darning, trying to make my few poor clothes look decent."

Doris stopped swinging her feet and rested her elbows on her knees and her chin between her palms.

"They tell me, Fay, you're a great favorite in the supper game. No party complete without you, and that the men are all crazy to meet you. But don't you honestly think that you're traveling a little fast for a beginner?"

Fay turned suddenly from the window and looked Doris evenly in the eyes.

"Just what do you mean by that?" she asked.

"I mean," said Doris, "that is, if I am to believe what I hear, and my information is pretty good, that you're not very particular as to the men you go to supper with. The rah-rah boys I run with aren't such a much, but they're gentlemen. This crowd of yours may be rich—I guess they're that all right, but they're cheap. They like to take

you to the big restaurants with the big crowds, like Rector's, and Churchill's, and the Madrid, because they want to be seen with the best-looking show-girl in New York—the girl they're all talking about. If you never want to hit the straw, Fay, why don't you take up with the real thing—the married men and the smart society crowd that's afraid to be seen with us theatrical ladies, and who give their parties in private supper-rooms, with their own band and coon singers to amuse you?"

Fay nodded. "I'm going to one of those to-morrow night. Marie Walters is going to take me."

"Well, Marie's a nice girl," Doris said, "that is, if you say it quick. You don't want to go to sleep when Marie's about. You probably know the story about her and the slippers?"

Gloomy, depressed and disinterested, Fay shook her head.

"It seems," Doris went on, unruffled, "that some girl,—Maizie Allen, it was,—had on a new pair of slippers at a supper where Marie happened to be, and the slippers were so tight that she took them off under the table. Well, when the party broke up, Maizie groped about for her slippers, but she couldn't find them any place. It really looked as if

she'd have to go home in her silk-stockinged feet, till somebody saw one of the slippers sticking out of Marie Walters' pocket. Sure, Marie's a nice girl, but she's what my friend, James Alexander Stuart, calls predatory. Now if—"

"He's going to be there to-morrow night," Fay interrupted, "so Marie says."

"Is he?" said Doris. "That sounds like a good party. I'd like to go if I could get by with a Cinderella first-act make-up, and they wouldn't let the clock bark out the hour of midnight. What's become of your friend, Porter Fielding? I haven't heard you mention him for a long, long time. Quit, eh?"

Fay looked up at Doris with eyes that had suddenly become misty and then out of the window on the grimy walls of the court.

"Yes," she said, "in a way, I guess we've quit."

Doris slid off the trunk, and going over to Fay, stood back of her and placed her hands gently on her shoulders.

"I'm sorry, Fay," she said. "I shouldn't have asked you that, but I was afraid that something was wrong between you two the way you've been going

it lately. You're not drinking much at these parties, are you, Fay?"

Fay shook her head. "Not much," she said.

"I'm glad of that, anyhow. Most of the girls I know when they believe they really care for a man usually celebrate with a pint, and then when they have a row try to forget it with a quart. And then that liquor habit!—I tell you that's something awful. I know a girl in our chorus, Mae Darnton, that's always falling in love with some prince. And then, when he throws her over in a couple of days, Mae discovers some entirely new liquor, put up in a queer-looking bottle, and tries to drown her sorrow in it before anybody else can get a taste. If the johns only stood by the chorus girls instead of ditching them all the time, I believe the dealers in liquors would be driven out of business."

She opened the door and blew a kiss toward Fay.

"Have a good time at your party, dear," she said, "and don't forget you're the best-looking thing on Broadway. Nurse it, though, and try to hold on to your pink cheeks, and cut the hicks, and the kikes, and the ginks, and don't forget to tell me what you think of James Alexander Stuart."

"Good-by," Fay called, "and thank you. You're a wise kid."

Doris smiled and shook her head in protest.

"Not so very wise at that," she said; "but I've been eating caviar and alligator pears with those brigands and child-stealers, who give the hard working chorus girl dinners and suppers, for a long time. Broadway may be the Great White Way, my dear, and it surely is well lit up, especially at night. But I'll tell you, Fay, it's an awful crooked street, especially just above Forty-second Street."

CHAPTER VIII

THE supper-party to which Fay had been invited for the evening following, and which was to be at Martin's, was, by all odds, the most costly, and in all ways, the most interesting social event that she had yet attended. There were two large adjoining rooms, one of which was cleared for dancing, while the other was devoted to a buffet and numerous small tables. There were bunches of roses and big green plants scattered about in great profusion, and there were many comfortable lounging chairs and divans for those who preferred tête-à-têtes to dancing. For music there was a Hungarian band and a quartette of coon shouters, and from the very moment of her arrival until that of her leave-taking, many hours later, Fay always seemed conscious of the presence of a waiter, bowing low before her, and offering her a glass of champagne. It was the kind of a party that the very rich young men of New York like to give because it satisfies their taste for the good things to which

they are used, and gratifies their spirit of hospitality in offering to fair young women of the stage luxuries to which the young women themselves have been wholly unaccustomed, and of which their mothers, who probably scrubbed floors or washed clothes for an honest living, never even dreamed.

Fay knew at least half of the thirty women present, as they were either from her own company or she had met them at various supper-parties, but the men were all strangers to her. Even to her inexperienced eyes it was not difficult to see that they were of a different class from the kind of men she had met since coming to New York. The girls at the theater had assured her that at this particular party she would meet only "swells", and the girls were evidently right. But even if Fay was a stranger when she entered the big room, there was surely nothing left undone to make her feel very much at home at once, and that she was among friends. In a few minutes she had met every man in the place, and thereafter, at least as far as the men were concerned, she was beyond question the most popular woman in the room.

Fay not only danced very well, but she really enjoyed it, and, in consequence, she was never

allowed to stop until sheer exhaustion forced her to rest. At one o'clock there was an elaborate supper, and Fay, with half a dozen others who had been much together during the early part of the evening, gathered about one of the tables. For the next hour she ate and drank the good things put before her, listened to the coon quartette sing comic songs, joined in the choruses whether she knew the words or not, and had a thoroughly amusing and happy time.

Once, just before supper, Fay had danced with Jimmy Stuart, but it was some hours later when she found her first opportunity to talk to him alone. He had asked her to dance with him again, but she begged off on the plea of being thoroughly tired out, and suggested that they go some place for a quiet talk. Stuart seemed delighted with the idea and led her to a little room just across the hallway from the ballroom, where it was comparatively quiet and where, at least, they were quite alone. Fay made herself comfortable in the depths of a low divan, and Stuart sat in a big armchair facing her. He was a rather heavily built young man, with a hard muscular figure, a strong if not very handsome face, and gray eyes that were curiously

contradictory because, while they were serious eyes, they always seemed to be smiling and inviting one's confidence. He was in many ways very much like the other young men at the party except that either he did not drink champagne or did not show the effects of it, and he was chiefly conspicuous for a certain old-time courtesy in his manner, which to women was as charming as it was unusual.

"I wanted to meet you very much, Mr. Stuart," Fay began, "because I owe you such a lot."

Stuart smiled and sank back in his chair.

"That's fine," he laughed, "and most unexpected. How much do you *owe* me?"

Fay looked him evenly in the eyes. "One hundred dollars."

Stuart took out his cigarette case, lighted a cigarette, and blew a few rings at a pair of amorous cupids on the frescoed ceiling.

"That's very interesting," he said. "Somehow I never thought of it as a cash debt. When did I have the honor of loaning you a hundred dollars?"

For some reason Fay did not find the confession as easy as she had anticipated, or, at least, hoped that it might be, and she spoke slowly and with

evident signs of embarrassment. "I borrowed it anonymously through Doris Yorke. I wanted to tell you how very grateful I was, and to assure you that it was a loan and not a gift of—of charity. It came at a time when I had to have money, and it saved me the humiliation of going to others who might not have been so kind—perhaps less exacting than you have been. It's not very easy for me to explain, as you can see, but perhaps you will understand."

Fay looked up at Stuart and found that he was regarding her with an apparently new interest.

"Of course, I understand," he said. "Doris told me something about you and your story, although she didn't tell me your name."

"Just what *did* Doris tell you?" Fay asked.

Stuart hesitated for a moment, blew a few more rings at the amorous cupids, and then: "You must understand, Miss Clayton, that our little friend, Doris, did *not* tell me your name."

Fay nodded. "I understand—please go on."

"It seems," Stuart began, "that a fearful bounder here in town, one Max Lusk, was very anxious, for one reason or another, to get you to New York. He was so anxious to get you here that he gave a young

man a position in his office because he did not believe that you would come unless this young man happened to be living here."

He looked at Fay and saw that her eyes were staring into his, and that her face had gone quite white.

"Is that news to you?" he asked.

"Yes," she said, "please go on, please."

"Well, then it seems," Stuart continued cheerfully, "that you spent your savings and were about to go to Lusk when he insulted you. It also seems that you were properly indignant, and not knowing much of Lusk or his kind, were, also, greatly surprised. But Doris Yorke knew that people soon become callous to all kinds of things in this big cruel town; and knowing also how greatly you needed the money, she feared that you would pardon Lusk and would still go to him for a loan. To prevent this she came to me. Under the circumstances, I can not consider my action in the matter particularly praiseworthy. You see I knew Max Lusk, even if I didn't know you."

Fay looked at Stuart and tried to smile but the effort was not much of a success.

"I'm very grateful to you, Mr. Stuart," she said.

"I didn't know how really grateful I was before."

Stuart suddenly became serious. "That's all right, but as long as we are telling each other our right names, I'm going to ask you a very impertinent question. Did you pardon Lusk?"

"Yes, I pardoned him. It's impossible to explain the conditions but he came to me at a moment when I wasn't myself—I wasn't myself at all. He'd always been very kind to me except—except that one time. I didn't know then why he brought me to New York."

"One more question," Stuart said. "Forgive me for asking, but have you ever borrowed money from him since?"

Fay shook her head. "No. No—he offered to loan me some, but, thank God, I refused."

"Well, that's good, anyhow," Stuart said with a sigh of relief. "Now, let's be cheerful again. Do you like this sort of thing—I mean these dances?"

"Why, yes, I suppose I do. They keep your mind off other troubles, and, besides, it all seems to be part of the game, and apparently it's the only game for a girl in my position. You've seen enough of the theater to know that a girl can't hold herself as being any better than the rest and expect to get on."

"But you can't go on doing this sort of thing," Stuart protested, "that is, not on your present salary."

"I have so far," Fay said, "that is, I have with the hundred you loaned me."

Stuart shook his head in violent protest. "But you can't keep it up—I know you can't. What is your ultimate ambition, anyhow? Do you want to get married, or do you want to be a great actress?"

"Both," Fay laughed.

"And do you consider the kind of life you are leading now," Stuart asked, "to be a proper step to either?"

"I do, and I'm working on a carefully thought out and well defined scheme. I'm making myself conspicuous, which is apparently the first ambition of every actress, and I'm keeping myself respectable, which is, of course, absolutely necessary to a successful marriage."

Stuart stood up and smiled pleasantly down at Fay's smiling eyes.

"Do you really think you can win out with that theory?"

"Of course I can," Fay laughed, "watch me."

"All right," he said, "I'll watch you and I'll help you, too. You have the courage of your convictions, anyhow, but, really, I don't think our best young men, unless they happen to be very young indeed, are looking for wives in private supper-rooms. Have you fixed it up with any one to take you home?"

Fay blushed and shook her head. "'Nobody asked me, sir,' she said."

"Good," cried Stuart, "then we'll have one more dance and finish our talk in the cab."

It was dawn when they started up the avenue on the way to Mother Yorke's flat, and Fay, sleepy and thoroughly tired out, was grateful that Stuart showed no inclination to continue their recent conversation that had taken such a purely personal and even intimate turn. The taxicab whirled them over the gray deserted streets, and then along the broad bowered roadways of the park. The cool morning air seemed wonderfully fresh and clean after that of the hot smoky supper-room; and both of them, quite at peace and content, preferred to remain in complete silence. It had been the first really happy evening that Fay had known for a long time and she was as conscious of this as she was that her pleasure was almost entirely due to her meeting

with Stuart. In his presence she enjoyed a feeling of such perfect safety and protection, and then, too, he seemed to understand her and he was so sincere and honest in all that he said. When they were within a few blocks of her home, Stuart picked up Fay's purse from the cushion where she had laid it, placed a roll of bills in it, and handed it to her.

"There's some ammunition to fight Lusk with," he said. "Let me know when you need any more, won't you?"

Fay shook herself free from her lethargy and sat up straight on the edge of the seat, once more quite wide awake.

"Why should I take money from you," she asked, "and not from Lusk?"

"Don't make me laugh, Miss Clayton," Stuart said. "I'm backing that theory of yours just as I would back a theory about a race-horse. I don't happen to think it's a very fine theory, but I've got as good a chance putting my money on it as I have on a race-horse. Better, perhaps, I should think from my experience."

The cab stopped before her door, and Fay turned her face toward him and her big eyes looked fairly into his.

"Just what is *your* theory?" she asked.

"My theory in your particular case," he said, "would be to give up late suppers, and live in a hall bedroom and save something every week out of your salary. And, furthermore, I'll bet you'll do it some day, and you'll do it of your own sweet will, and because you want to do it."

"Then why give me the money?" she persisted.

"Why? Because white gloves, and hats with plumes on them, and pretty dresses cost money, and if I didn't supply them or the wherewithal to get them, in your present frame of mind somebody else might, and I'm the least dangerous giver I know. Also, I've always understood if you want to make a child stop eating candy the easiest way was to feed it candy until it was good and sick. You're really only a child, and my theory is that you're going to be good and sick pretty soon."

"All right," said Fay. "I'll take the money because you're you, but tell me one thing more. If I wear white gloves, and pretty dresses and expensive hats I'll wear them for people to see, and the people will know well enough that I'm not buying them out of my salary. What's the difference between the name and the game?"

Stuart got up and let himself out of the cab.

"The difference," he said, holding out his hand to her, "is much the most important thing in life—your conscience."

With a sudden impulse Fay took his hand in both of hers. "Thank you," she said. "I'll remember that and all the other things you've said. Good night to you. You'll call me up sometimes, won't you?"

"Of course I will," Stuart laughed; "why, the fight has only just begun. Good night."

It was past noon when Fay awoke the next morning, and after dressing she went out into the little sitting-room. With the exception of Mr. Hooker, who was dozing in his rocking-chair before the window, the place was quite deserted. As Fay came in the old man roused himself and blinked and smiled at her with an unusual cheerfulness.

"Good morning, my dear," he said, "and how are you to-day?"

Fay glanced at herself in the mirror that hung over the mantel and wearily shook her head.

"Not very well," she sighed. "Our Fay isn't looking her best these days."

"Too many late hours, my child," the old man chuckled; "it's the beauty sleep you miss, and that's the only kind that'll bring the roses back to your cheeks."

"I don't think it's exactly that," Fay said. "I guess it's just worry over trying to keep step with a whole regiment of people who have been marching together for years. I'm an awfully raw recruit, and I don't learn easily—that's all."

She sat down in a chair facing the old man and went on talking.

"Mr. Hooker, just now when I was putting on my shoes, I was wondering what a girl ought to do when men throw money at her, literally throw it at her. You understand what I'm trying to get at—you know, when she hasn't worked for it."

"Meaning you?" he asked.

"Yes, meaning me."

"I'd throw it back," said Mr. Hooker. "But don't tell Mother Yorke or Angie I said so."

Fay met his smiling glance and nodded.

"I guess you're right. It's so hard sometimes for me to keep my point of view. The old standards I had at Pleasantville seem to have gone to smash

long ago and to have come tumbling about my poor head."

"That's a pity," said Mr. Hooker. "I know how hard it is to keep up to the high mark you set for yourself and yet—"

"And yet—" Fay repeated.

The old man smiled and ran his fingers slowly through his long white beard. Then he took out his watch, and opening it, showed Fay a photograph pasted on the lid opposite the crystal. It was a cheap photograph, stained and faded, of a very old woman with snow-white hair, a wrinkled face and a mouth and eyes that evidently knew no such thing as compromise.

"That," he said, "was my mother. It's a copy taken from an old photograph. I'm sorry it's so bad, for I don't think it does her justice, quite. Mother was a hard woman, but very fair and very just, but I didn't know that until afterward. You see, I went away when I was pretty young and— and she died before I ever began to find out some of the things that she had done for me. Died long before I ever had a chance to find out, and to show her how grateful I was for all those years of pain and suffering that I had caused her and for all the

care she had given me as a kid. But later when I grew up, and everywhere I looked I saw women suffering, and depriving themselves, and starving for their children, then I understood what my mother had done."

He glanced down at the photograph and then at Fay, who was looking at the picture, too.

"I know you'll think it's a hard face, my dear," he went on again, "but she wasn't hard. She was very gentle with me, and, even now, I can remember when I used to run to her; and how she'd put out her arms; and her smile was just like an angel's—yes, my dear, just like an angel's.

"There are weeks, months I should say, perhaps there have been years, when I have opened that watch again and again and looked only on the face which would tell me the hour of the day. But there have been other times when I looked only for the face of my mother—times when, as you say, things go tumbling about your head, and you're crying out for help, and the kind of help that even your friends can't give you."

"I know what you mean," Fay said, "but you see, Mr. Hooker, I haven't a picture of my mother—I haven't even the faintest memory of her."

The old man put out his hand and patted her gently on the knee.

"I know, my dear," he went on, "I know, but, believe me, there are the memories of other things. Have you forgotten your home—the place you lived when you knew only the innocent thoughts of a child?"

"I have no home," Fay said. "I have no home now—that is gone absolutely."

The old man shook his head.

"No," he said, "it's not gone any more than the hills you knew as a child are gone. It is still there, just as the trees you used to climb are there, and the fields and the meadows you played in are there. And if I were you, I would go back there sometime—sometime before it is too late—and I would wander over the fields and among the trees that you knew as old friends. And if you are no longer welcome at your home, you can still see it, even if it is from a great distance. It's wonderful, my dear young lady, how those simple things of the days when our minds were simple will refresh us, and make us better and give us the strength to go on with the fight. Because when we reach a certain age, we must all fight—the peace and the content are gone,

and it is only to the very old, who have given up the struggle, and who are waiting for the end, that those days of peace and content can ever return. So save the memory of them, my dear, save it as you would your good name, and the name of your mother you never knew."

Fay got up and in silence started to leave the room.

"And the money," he asked, "the money that is thrown at you by men—you will send it back?"

Fay turned and smiled and with the tips of her fingers blew a kiss to the old man.

"Yes," she said. "That is what I am going to do now—send it back."

This was the letter that Fay, in the seclusion of her bedroom, wrote to Stuart:

"My dear James Stuart:

"I am returning you the roll of bills you so kindly and tactfully pressed upon me last night. As I have not counted them I do not know the amount any more than you do, but I am sure it was good for many pairs of white gloves and big joyous hats and even pretty dresses. I wish that I could take the credit to myself for sending it back, but I can't. It is all due to my fellow-boarder, Mr. Hooker, an ex-medicine-showman, a philosopher of the ham-and-eggs school, with a body destroyed by excesses,

and yet who regards virtue as a beautiful concrete thing—more beautiful and more concrete than the most wonderfully cut jewel in the world. Decrepit, dependent, his fading eyes set on a green land, where he hopes that even his sins will be forgotten and forgiven, he has asked me in his own way to remember the days when I played dolls on the lowest hanging bough in our orchard, and when my mind was as pure and my soul as white as the apple blossoms.

“You said last night that the difference between the name and the game was a clear conscience. Is the girl’s conscience clear who can declare aloud: I am virtuous—virtuous according to the laws and traditions made by the courts and society? How about her heart if it be crossed and seared and scarred by a knowledge of crime and vice?—unsought if you will, but there it is. Do you believe that we can awake the next morning, and with our limbs still trembling from fear, thank the Lord that we were strong enough to have withstood temptation, and do you believe that we are still pure, and in the eyes of the world, still acceptable in God’s sight? But, believe me, the scar is there.

“Since I have come to New York, my broker friends have been forever telling me that the market is bad, that money is tight, and yet these same men have done nothing but offer me money, money, and again money and everything that money will buy. They mortgage their homes, they sell their yachts and cars, they deprive their wives of the very necessities of life, and yet for the new and pretty face they can still somewhere find money. Of course, my dear

Mr. Stuart, I know that you are different. They tell me that you are an eccentric philanthropist, giving much and expecting nothing, but even your money must leave its scar, pull us down a little nearer to the point where we don't care.

"I know that you said all this to me last night—that is, you tried to warn me in your own way, and to wager that I would in time come to your own way of thinking. Well, you win. I'm going to try to dedicate myself to my art, and to the bacon and the bad coffee of the Yorke family. If you hear of me again in the gay world it will be as 'One-Dress Fay.' I don't know that I can give it up altogether. I rather imagine I'm too weak for that. It's really going to be very hard at times—especially after a long night at the theater, and when I'm tired and hungry. But, at least, I can promise you that hereafter I am going to take your advice and live on my salary, and anything you hear to the contrary I want you to know is not true.

"Also, when you get this, please do not write me a letter of condolence or send me a bunch of orchids, and for a week, anyhow, please do not try to see me. Just let me alone, for that long, to fight it out by myself, or rather with the help of our little friend, Doris, and Mr. Hooker, the medicine man. So, here's luck to you, Mr. James Alexander Stuart, and lots of it—and may you pardon the ravings of,

"Yours emotionally,

"FAY CLAYTON."

Without reading the letter over, Fay put it in an envelope, sealed it, and then left her room to look

in the telephone book for Stuart's address. In the hallway she met Doris. The girl was trembling with excitement, her usually smiling face had gone quite white, and her thin colorless lips were drawn into a straight hard line.

"What is it?" Fay asked. "Is there anything the matter, Doris, tell me?"

Doris shook her head, and gently but firmly pushed Fay to one side.

"No, it's nothing much. I've got to see mother and Angie. I've got something to say to them, *now*. They've gone a little too far this time." Then just as she reached the door she threw over her shoulder: "You'd better come along, Fay. It may interest you, too."

They went into the sitting-room, where they found Mr. Hooker in his usual place before the window. Angie was seated on a sofa in the corner plucking proudly at the broad satin ribbons of a large black velvet hat, and Mrs. Yorke was before the mirror trying on an even more ostentatious affair—a kind of turban of red silk and white paradise feathers. At the entrance of the two girls Mrs. Yorke turned quickly and glanced at her daughter.

"Well, Doris," she said, with a somewhat labored

attempt at gaiety, "what do you think of mother's new winter hat, and Angie's, too? Heaven knows it's time we had them."

For several tense moments Doris stood silent in the center of the room, her teeth clenched, her hands stuck deep in her coat pockets. She glanced first at her mother and then at Angie, and then the tempest of her wrath suddenly broke.

"Where did you get them?" she demanded.

"Where did we get them?" Mrs. Yorke echoed. "Why, we got them from a little money your father's lawyer sent me, and it was high time he was sending us something, high time!"

Doris looked the woman evenly in the eyes. "Mother," she said, "that's not true."

Mrs. Yorke's round face turned a brilliant red and her whole figure seemed to swell to abnormal proportions, while Angie, clasping her hat to her breast, cowered in the corner as if some one was about to strike her.

"What did you say," Mrs. Yorke fairly shrieked, "what did you say, you little hussy!"

"Don't get excited, mother," Doris said, trying hard to subdue her own rage, "or you're liable to die of apoplexy. You got those hats, or the money

for them, from Tommy Garrison, when he came up to see me yesterday afternoon and I was out. I know it's so because I just heard it from a friend of Tommy's down-town."

"Well," shouted Mrs. Yorke, "can't Tommy Garrison buy two poor women a couple of hats? His father's rich enough, isn't he? He's worth—"

"I don't know about his father," Doris interrupted, "but I know all about Tommy. He's a nice kid, but he hasn't got a cent of his own. I would no more ask him for a hat than I would a blind beggar with a tin sign on his chest."

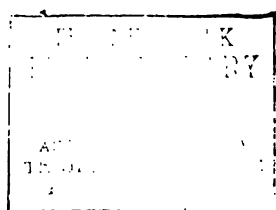
Mrs. Yorke leaned her bulky frame against the mantel-shelf, and folding her arms across her ample breast, sneered at her daughter, who was standing white and rigid in the center of the room.

"No," she said, "you wouldn't ask no millionaire's son for nothing. You'd let your mother starve, and you'd let her go about in rags before you'd lift your hand to help her. What good has all the bringing up I gave you and all your pretty ways and your pretty face done for me, and Pop, and Angie, here? No good, I say, and now you even begrudge us a couple of hats."

With blanched face and her teeth set, Doris threw



"Mother," she said, "that's not true."



up her hand, and there was something in the girl's manner that subdued the mother into abject silence.

"Mother," Doris began, "for the last five years I've worked for you, and for Angie, and for Pop, and you have all lived pretty much on what I've earned. I know I haven't made much, but what I made you got. And, besides that, I've gone to men for money to pay the rent and the bills, and just because these boys were kind and easy, and because they were sorry for me, they gave up."

Mrs. Yorke started to speak, but once more Doris threw up her hand and the old woman was silent.

"And during all that time," she went on, "ever since I was fourteen years old, there has never been a moment that you wouldn't have sold me to the highest bidder. You've never had the nerve to say it in so many words, but I know, mother, I know. They talk about the men in this town and the harm they do to girls on the stage, and, God knows, the men are bad enough, but how about the mothers who have daughters in the show business, and who drive their girls out, not for what there is in it for the girls, but for what they can get out of it themselves? It isn't the girls, and it isn't the men. Believe me, it's the mothers, like you, who are crazy

for hats and new dresses, that send most of the girls to the devil in this town."

Her face gone livid with rage, Mother Yorke bent her heavy body low as if about to spring at Doris.

"You lie, you little devil," she cried, "you lie, and you know you lie!"

Doris looked at the old woman, unmoved, and shrugged her shoulders. "Don't get hysterical, mother," she said, "I just wanted to tell you why it's all over."

Mother Yorke pulled herself up straight, and with her arms resting on her broad hips, leaned against the mantel.

"What do you mean by all over?" she sneered.

"I mean," Doris went on in the same even unimpassioned voice. "I mean that I'm going to quit you. I'm going to quit you, and I'm going to quit Angie. Hereafter you two can graft, and lie, and fight for your own living, and may God have mercy on you both."

Old man Hooker got up from his chair, and shuffling over to where Doris stood, put out his hand and touched her gently on the sleeve.

"Won't you take me with you, Doris?" he begged. "Please don't leave me here with them."

Doris turned, and smiling at her grandfather, put her arm under his.

"That's all right, Pop," she said. "Of course, you'll go with me, and perhaps Fay will come, too, and the three of us can start a little home of our own."

Fay glanced at Mrs. Yorke's flushed angry face and at poor Angie Clubb, crouching at the end of the sofa and whimpering aloud, and then nodded to Doris.

"Why, yes," she said, "of course, I'll go."

Mother Yorke glared at her brazenly. "Go ahead," she taunted, "and good riddance, I say! I don't care very much about having a girl in my house who keeps the hours that you have lately, Miss Clayton. It ain't respectable."

The blood surged to Fay's face, her throat suddenly became parched, and she could not force the words she wanted to speak through her lips. Doris shook her head at Fay to warn her not to answer, and then nodded in the direction of the door.

"I think, Fay, you'd better pack now," she said. "We'll be getting out this afternoon." Then she turned to her grandfather. "Come along, Pop," and taking him by the arm, and without looking

again at her mother or Angie, she led the old man from the room.

As the door closed on them Angie stretched herself at full length on the lounge and sobbed aloud. Not so with Mrs. Yorke, who, having regained her composure in a remarkably short space of time, stood before the mirror once more regarding herself and her new head-gear. She glanced at the weeping Angie, and then removing her hat, held it before her at arm's length and apparently scrutinized its every detail with the greatest possible interest and pleasure.

"Shut up, will you!" she suddenly threw at Angie, and then once more turned her attention to the hat. "And all on account," she sighed, "of doing a rah-rah boy out of a couple of measly bonnets. It makes me that sore. If I—"

The rest of the sentence was lost in Angie's cries. "We'll starve," she moaned, "we'll starve. It's cruel for them to leave us like that—it's inhuman."

Mrs. Yorke tossed her hat on the center table and regarded her niece with an apparently new and speculative interest.

"No, we won't starve," she said in her deep thundering tones.

Seeing a possible ray of hope for a continuance of her lazy selfish life, Angie sat up on the edge of the sofa and hurriedly dabbed her wet eyes with a much-used handkerchief.

"What'll we do," she gasped between sobs, "what is it we'll do?"

"It isn't so much what *we'll* do," Mother Yorke went on gloomily, as if condemning a prisoner to a life sentence, "as it is what *you'll* do. Now you put on that new hat of yours, and try to borrow a fresh pair of white gloves from Doris or Fay—they may be generous to you now that they're going away. Then you go down-town and proceed to stump up the stairs of every manager in the city, and you keep on stumping until you get a job, and, Angie Clubb, never you dare come into that door again empty-handed. Do you hear me?"

Mrs. Yorke drew herself to her full majestic proportions and with the manner of a true tragedy queen pointed to the door.

"Now, you grafter," she fairly shouted, her eyes ablaze, "you blond loafer—get out!"

For two days, Fay and Doris and her grandfather stopped at a hotel in the neighborhood and then moved to a furnished flat on One Hundred and Thirtieth Street, far over on the west side. The new apartment was very small, and ill-lighted, and stuffy, and the wall-paper and furniture were cheap and vulgar and garish, but it was the best they could afford, as Mr. Hooker could be of no financial assistance, and Fay had insisted that, at least for the present, it would be only right for Doris to send half of her salary to her mother. The girls did the cooking and the housework and in all ways practised the strictest economy. They had promised each other that they would live on their wages, and would neither ask nor accept assistance of any kind. It was a life in which there was or could be little sunshine, but one fraught with hardship and deprivation. The two girls took long walks in the morning and in the evening went down-town together to their respective theaters and returned together as soon as their performances were over.

Doris was cheerful and even happier than she had been when she was the main support of Mother Yorke's flat, but the lack of variety in her life and the hopeless vulgarity of her new home wore seri-

ously on Fay's nerves, and she became constantly more gloomy and depressed. She no longer had the money to buy even the few things that would have been necessary had she continued to go to the lunches and supper-parties at which for a time she had been so conspicuous a figure. But as she persisted in refusing all invitations, the invitations became constantly less frequent, and in a short time she was no longer asked out at all. It was also but natural that in her present unhappy mood, the girls at the theater should show but slight desire for her company and gradually leave her to her own devices.

For the time being her spirit was gone, and she was morbidly conscious of her lack of suitable clothes and the cramped flat with its stale musty odor had become almost unbearable. Lusk had written her several times, and was most anxious to give her various kinds of parties. She had always refused these invitations with short formal notes, and had finally written him curtly that she no longer went anywhere, but was devoting herself entirely to her stage work, and to the study that was necessary for her future career. Had such been the case Fay would have been much happier than she was, but she was only too well aware of the fact

that she was not only not learning anything that could possibly be of any value to her, but that she no longer did her work at the theater with the spirit that the management had a right to expect. On several occasions, after she had left the stage, Morley had reprimanded her sharply for her indifference, and once he had threatened her with dismissal if she did not show an immediate and marked improvement in her performance.

Stuart had done as Fay had asked, and for a week, had neither written her nor sent her flowers nor in any way recognized her existence. But, at the end of that time, he came with a car laden with roses. She received him in the little sitting-room and at the sight of his friendly face, for a moment the old happy light flared up in her eyes, but it was only for a moment. Her instinct had told her from that first long evening which they had spent together that Stuart liked her, and she was quite sure that she could rely absolutely on his friendship. She knew, too, that she liked him and admired him more than any other man whom she had met since she had first come to New York. But she was not in a condition of mind to encourage new friendships.

Her attitude was that of the wounded animal who wishes only to run away and hide from its kind.

The visit was a failure. Fay knew it, and Stuart knew it. He talked of things farthest removed from her present life, vital things, in which he wanted her to be interested, and in which he knew and she knew that she ought to be interested. But Fay's mind was no longer capable of receiving new impressions. Her body was starved and her mind was dulled by too much trouble. And so, in a short time, he left her, disappointed and discouraged, but still hopeful that her mood was but temporary and that he could yet lead her back to a sane point of view and to a normal healthy life. She tried to be gracious at this first short visit, as she did at the others that followed, but, even if the desire was there, the girl's spirit was crushed and she was unable to rise above the depression of her mind or the poverty of her surroundings. In every way possible Stuart tried, again and again, to arouse her from her apathy, but each of these visits left him painfully conscious of his failure. He admired her enormously for the stand that she had taken and for which he was largely responsible. However, this in no way sur-

prised him, because he thought he understood something of women, and from the first he had believed Fay to be a girl of wonderful and infinite possibilities. In spite of the failure of his early efforts to arouse any interest in her or to bring her back to even a shadow of her former happy self, he continued to visit her whenever she would receive him. But, in time, he came to feel that his efforts were not only hopeless but that Fay would prefer to be left alone with her fellow-lodgers. Therefore, the visits became less and less frequent, and he contented himself by sending her flowers and books so that she should be constantly reminded of his admiration and of his ever-present friendship.

But for Fay the empty profitless days dragged on, and with barely enough money on which to exist, bereft of the companionship of the encouragement of her friends, save Stuart, Fay could find no happiness in the present or little to hope for in the future. Of all the men that she had known it was, of course, Fielding that she missed the most. With his friendship to cheer her on, and his hand always held out to her as it was in the old days, she believed that even her present dull existence would have been possible. But her pride had

been hurt, terribly hurt, and she felt that the difference in the lives they now led had carried them very far apart and that he no longer cared for her. The only solace she found in this gray unhappy life was that it was above suspicion and that there was nothing with which Fielding could reproach her. Several times she had seen him in the audience at the theater, but, although when she looked in his direction and found that his eyes were always on her, she had never given him any sign that she was conscious of his presence.

It was on a cold raw afternoon, late in November, that Fay suddenly determined that she would visit Fielding at his rooms. She had been feeling particularly miserable and lonesome all day, and it was probably this extreme depression that prompted the thought. She decided that perhaps she had been unnecessarily sensitive, and that, after all, he really did care for her, even craved to have her back, just, as ever since their separation, she had craved to have him back again. It was her hope that he might feel just as she felt, and that he would want to hold both of her hands in his, and to tell her, in his own way, that she was more to him than any one else in the whole world. Her mind made up, she began at once

to prepare for her visit to him. She thought at first that she would telephone him of her coming, and then she decided that it would be better to have her little visit a complete surprise.

Hurry as she might, she could not arrive until after five o'clock, when he was almost sure to be at home, and, in her mind, she pictured just what their meeting was to be. He would be standing at the door of his apartment, his left hand as usual stuck deep in his dressing-gown pocket, and in his right hand he would be holding his pipe, and not knowing, of course, who it was who had rung his bell, he would be greatly annoyed and scowling at the unexpected visitor. But at the sight of Fay his face would break into a broad smile, and he would call out his welcome to her, and holding out both his arms, would hurry along the passage so as to meet her at least half-way. And then she would run to him, and when he had drawn her into the room, he would kiss her on the forehead, as he always did, and, perhaps, he would put his big strong arms about her and tell her how very much he had missed her, how glad he was to have her back again, and that there never would, or never could be another separation like this one.

Fortunately the day was cold, and Fay assured herself there would be a blazing wood fire on the hearth, and she had always wanted so much to see a fire there. Their first greetings over, he would pull up his favorite armchair, and then he would sit on the floor at her feet and smoke his pipe, just as he used to do in the old days. They would both look at the crackling logs, and he would tell her how lonely he had been without her, and how never again must there be any trouble between them. Afterward, when they were safely back again on the old intimate footing, and the last trace of their quarrel had been swept away, she would make the tea, and Fielding would get out the tin boxes of crackers he always kept in the cupboard. She would eat a great many of them because, instead of coming back to the flat for dinner, she would be sure to decide to remain at his rooms until it was time for her to go to the theater. These, and many similar thoughts, passed again and again through Fay's mind as with great care she prepared for her visit.

She put on her blue tailored suit that, in spite of the hard service it had seen, still looked fairly well, and after a long search she discovered some fairly fresh white gloves and a pair of black

silk stockings, which, although they had been darned many times, were quite good enough for one more wearing. When Fay was nearly ready she glanced at herself in the mirror, and at the sight of the pale face and the shadows under her eyes, gave a little startled gasp of disappointment. But, to offset this, she found some consolation in the knowledge that the eyes were as bright as they had ever been and shone with a light to which they had been strangers for many days. She took courage, too, from the masses of wonderful red hair and the scarlet cupid-bow lips, the beauty of which no troubles or deprivations could dim. On her way out she met Doris in the hallway, and very much to the younger girl's surprise, threw her arms about her and kissed her warmly on the thin pale lips.

"Kid," she cried, "I'm going back to Porter. Wish me luck, won't you?"

Doris held her off at arm's length and looked at the white gloves, and then at the eyes, fairly ablaze with the old light.

"You bet I wish you luck, Fay, dear," she cried, "and such a lot of it!"

CHAPTER IX

IN ANSWER to Fay's ring the lock of Fielding's front door clicked, and with a little gasp of pleasure that she had really found him at home, she hurried up the long flights of stairs. Instead of catching the first sight of Fielding standing at the door of his apartment, as she had expected, she found him waiting for her on the landing. Contrary to her expectations, also, he neither held out his arms to her, nor gave the sudden cry of surprise and pleasure that she had anticipated. In reality Fielding appeared greatly confused, and his manner was very formal, almost ungracious.

"Why, Fay," he said, holding out his hand, "this is quite a surprise. I have some friends to tea—come in, won't you?"

For a moment Fay stood still, hesitating. "I don't know what to do," she stammered. "I think I'd better not come in to-day."

It was quite evident that Fielding was annoyed, and he made but a sorry effort to conceal it. He

bit his lip, looked back at the open door, and shrugged his shoulders.

"It's too late to go back, now, Fay," he said in a whisper. "They've heard you. You'd better come along."

She followed him into the sitting-room where she found Miss Wilmerding at the tea-table and an elderly white-haired lady sitting before the hearth. The blazing wood fire at least was as Fay had expected to see it. As she entered, the two women rose, and Miss Wilmerding, recognizing her at once, held out her hand.

"I'm so glad to see you again, Miss Clayton," she said, and then turning to the woman by the fireplace; "this is my aunt, Mrs. Henley."

The elder woman bowed and sat down again in the big armchair—the chair in which, earlier in the afternoon, Fay had pictured herself, at luxurious ease, with Porter sitting at her feet, smoking the pipe of peace. The unexpectedness of it all, the sudden death-blow to the happy hour she had planned, and more particularly, the coldness of Fielding's reception, had left Fay confused and uncertain of herself. Her habitual poise and the ease and grace of the girl's manner had vanished, and she found herself

standing irresolute and overcome with a sudden fright and a great longing to run away. She heard Miss Wilmerding say something about tea, found courage to refuse in a few formal words of thanks, and dropped into a stiff high-backed chair that Fielding had placed for her between the two women.

"I think I saw you once at Pleasantville," Mrs. Henley said to her. "You were playing quite a wonderful game of tennis. And then I saw you the other night, when I went to the theater with Blanche here and Mr. Fielding. I think the play is charming, don't you?—so clean, and free from suggestion—unlike so many of the plays of to-day—and amusing, too. The music I thought particularly nice."

"And, really, Miss Clayton," Miss Wilmerding added with genuine enthusiasm, "I never saw any one look so lovely in my life as you do in the second act, in that green spangly dress and the big black hat. I was just crazy about you. You know, I've seen the show several times."

Fay smiled and nodded to the girl. "I'm glad you think I looked so well," she said. "It's really quite a wonderful dress—that green one."

Her courage had suddenly returned to her, but with it a violent dislike for the two women. To her

confused distorted mind their simple and sincere expressions of pleasure about the performance and her personal appearance appealed to her only as a species of lying pleasantries, and spoken solely to make her feel at ease. The hot blood tingled through her body, and she resented their well-meant words as keenly as she resented their presence. This room had once been hers—at least she had been its brightest ornament—and she had hoped to hold the same position in it again. But now these interlopers had come, with their gorgeous furs and their fine clothes and their gracious manners, and had supplanted her.

“Do you like your life on the stage?” Mrs. Henley asked.

Fay looked at the elder woman, pursed her lips and wrinkled her brow as if in some doubt as to her answer. In reality her thoughts flew back to the crowded dressing-room at the theater, filled with cigarette smoke, to the loud vulgar talk of the girls, and then to the stuffy up-town flat where she lived, or rather starved, with Doris and the old ex-medicine man.

“Yes,” she said at last, speaking with much deliberation, “I think I like it very much. Of course,

advancement is a little slow at first, but it's not a bad life while you're waiting for fame and wealth. I suppose there is a sort of glamour about women of the stage—that is, there seems to be in the case of a certain kind of men in town—I mean the men of your class.” Fay hesitated, smiled at Mrs. Henley, and went on, “I really don't know why, but they must get awfully bored at home, for they're forever running after us, and giving us suppers and dances in private rooms and taking us on long, cozy automobile rides. I don't know what the inns around New York would do if it weren't for us show-girls and the rich married swells.”

Fay had spoken the last few words with her eyes cast on the floor as if to give an appearance of mock modesty, but when she glanced up again she found that Mrs. Henley was gazing into the fire with a look of complete boredom on her face. Blanche Wilmerding was smiling into her tea-cup, as if its interior decoration was a matter of much curiosity and amusement, but Fielding's eyes she found were set on her own, and she saw, also, that he was blushing furiously. Well, if he was ashamed of her, if he found her unworthy of these new friends, she would give him good cause. Surely, she argued, he had

brought it on himself—who was he that he should not have welcomed her return joyfully rather than as the unavoidable visit of some social pariah! Why, were these women better than she because she had chosen to work for an honest living? She looked into Fielding's scarlet, embarrassed, good-looking face and smiled at him knowingly.

"I'm very tired, Porter," she said. "Could you let me have a drop of that very good Scotch you gave me the other night when I was here? Just plain Scotch—no water, please."

Fielding got up, and taking a bottle of Scotch and a glass from the cupboard, poured out a drink and handed it to her in silence.

"And, Porter, dear," Fay ran on, "*could* you let me have a cigarette? I know Mrs. Henley and Miss Wilmerding won't mind, and it's such a tremendous tonic to my poor shattered nerves."

Fay lighted the cigarette herself, and holding it in one hand and the glass of Scotch in the other, she carefully crossed her feet so that between her low patent leather shoes and the edge of her skirt there was an ample display of black silk stocking.

"You see, Mrs. Henley," she went on, "it's really a very strenuous life I lead—working at night, and

then amusing the swells until all hours of the morning. But, of course, you will understand the latter part of it—any woman can sympathize with another who has to keep these New York business men amused or interested. They're really awfully dull, at least I find them so, but we shouldn't blame the poor souls, should we? I suppose they have to spend all of their puny brains on business during the day to make enough money to buy taxicabs and champagne for us show-girls at night."

She stopped just long enough to glance at Mrs. Henley, but finding that the old lady was looking with the same bored expression into the fire, Fay hurried on again.

"There was a most wonderful party up-stairs at Sherry's the other night. You wouldn't believe, Mrs. Henley, the men who were there—some of the biggest men in New York, merchants, and lawyers, and brokers, and all having the time of their dear old lives, dancing and making love to the girls. There were two bands and some corking vaudeville stunts, and then, later, a lot of the regular boys, the younger set, from a *débutante's* coming-out party. It certainly was good to get some new blood because the ancient captains of industry were just

about all in." Fay turned to Miss Wilmerding. "Don't you ever wonder, Miss Wilmerding," she said, smiling sweetly, "how these young men who go to a respectable party first and then hurry on to a chorus girls' ball and spend the night dancing and drinking, are able to go to their work at all in the morning?"

Miss Wilmerding smiled at Fay and shook her head.

"To tell you the truth," she said, "I'd never thought of it before—especially the chorus girls' ball part of it. Now that you mention it, I should think it must be a frightful effort, and some of the men really haven't got too many brains to squander, have they?"

"Not much they haven't," Fay laughed. "Now if they could only lie abed, as we do, until late into the afternoon it would be different. But men must work, I suppose—we women are such expensive playthings."

She glanced at the clock over the mantel, uncrossed her feet and rose from her chair.

"I'm afraid I must be going," she said abruptly. "I'm due at a little dinner before the performance."

Miss Wilmerding got up and shook hands in a

most friendly manner with her, but Mrs. Henley sat still, and her farewell was confined to a formal bow. Fielding opened the door and went with Fay as far as the landing at the head of the stairs.

"Good-by, Porter," she said. "I'm sorry I broke into your party. I hope I didn't talk too much, but your friends seemed so keen to know something about a show-girl's life, and I thought they might never have another chance to hear the inside story."

"Why, that's all right, Fay," Fielding said, holding out his hand. "I'm glad you came. Good-by."

For a moment after he had returned to the room there was an embarrassing silence. It was Miss Wilmerding who spoke first.

"Why didn't you tell us, Porter," she said, "that you had asked other guests? Such an amusing person, your friend, Miss Clayton."

Fielding hesitated, much confused. "You see, as a matter of fact," he stammered, "I didn't ask Miss Clayton. She just dropped in."

"How nice of her," Miss Wilmerding laughed. "Now is—"

"Very extraordinary of her, I should say," Mrs. Henley interrupted. "I may be old-fashioned, but

this idea of dropping into a bachelor's apartment for tea, or even a Scotch and soda and a cigarette, seems very modern to me. And her remarks about those dances, and the young men, and the captains of industry, were most unusual. Do people talk about that sort of thing nowadays?"

"It would seem so," Fielding said, "that is, some people do. Indeed, Mrs. Henley, I'm very sorry."

Miss Wilmerding sat back in her chair and laughed aloud.

"Why, Porter," she said, "what do you mean by saying you're sorry? The girl didn't like us—that's all. She was bluffing; she didn't touch the Scotch, and I could see by her face that she hated the cigarette. It almost made her sick. I'm sorry, too, but I'm sorry for her—not for any of us. The girl's sick, I tell you, and overworked and run down or something. I used to see her at Pleasantville, and she wasn't the same person at all, always laughing and full of fun, and had the most wonderful spirits, and now look at her. Have you seen much of her, Porter, since she came to town?"

Fielding shook his head. "Not much," he explained, "that is, not very much lately. Not at all for the last two months or so."

Miss Wilmerding put her palms together, slowly joined the tips of her fingers, and for a few moments stared up at the ceiling.

"Of course it's none of my business," she said, "and I don't know anything about it, but I do know that you used to be very good friends. It seems a pity for a girl alone in a big city to lose all of her old friends, doesn't it? I wonder if she would let me call on her? Don't you think it would be all right, Aunty?"

Mrs. Henley raised her eyebrows and slightly shrugged her shoulders. "I suppose so. I don't know where Miss Clayton lives, but it certainly can't be any worse than those awful East Side tenements and the jails you are always visiting!"

Miss Wilmerding got up. "Come on, Aunty," she said, "we must be going home." And then, turning to Fielding, "Don't forget you're coming to a family dinner to-night. Couldn't you see Miss Clayton to-day, somehow, and tell her that I want to call on her very soon?"

Fielding nodded. "Why, yes, I could see her after the performance, to-night, surely."

"Do that, will you, for me," Blanche said, smiling at him, "and try to fix it for to-morrow after-

noon. The sooner, the better, and then she will understand that I'm really interested."

"It's very good of you," Fielding said, "very good of you, and I know that Fay will appreciate it."

"Good of me!" Blanche laughed. "I'm only too glad to get the chance to know her better. I think she's bully."

When Fay left Fielding's apartment it was past six o'clock and there was not time for her to return to her home for dinner. It was already dark in the streets, the air was cold and raw, and there was a light rain falling. The sidewalks were crowded with men and women hurrying home from their work, but heedless of everything and everybody, she wandered on quite unconscious of where she was going. She put up her hand, and noticing the white glove she wore, smiled grimly and then brushed the rain from her eyes. The cold bleak air blowing in her face brought her to a sudden realization of just what she had done during her uncontrolled fit of jealousy and anger.

"It's all over now," she mumbled to herself, "it's

all over for you, Fay. And what for? Just for the fun of insulting two women who wanted to be civil to you—and they were friends of Porter's, too. I guess you must be crazy, Fay." For an hour she wandered along the wet pavements repeating the same morbid hopeless thoughts, heedless of where her footsteps led her and trying only to keep to those streets that seemed the least crowded. Her mind, utterly fagged out, her body exhausted and numb from the cold, she saw the lighted window of a cheap restaurant, and it reminded her that she must get something to eat if she expected to be able to go through the evening performance. At the far end of the restaurant she found a table where there were no men and only one other woman. A waiter with a dirty apron took her order for roast-beef and a cup of coffee, and then, with dull heavy eyes, Fay sat gazing at the cheaply stenciled walls, the fly-specked mirrors and the tawdry chromos with their broken and tarnished gilt frames.

"It's a pretty tough night, eh?" Fay heard a voice say, and she looked at the woman across the table. She was a middle-aged woman with a sallow face that had so much rouge on it that Fay

found herself wondering why the rain had not washed it off completely or made it run in little rivulets down her cheeks.

She nodded at the woman and made an attempt to smile, but it was a rather sorry effort, as her clothes were wet through, her body was so very tired and her limbs were numb from the cold.

"Yes, it's a very bad night," she said as civilly as she could.

"Too wet for white kid gloves," laughed the woman. "They'll be doing you no good to-night, my dear. Better keep your finery for the fair nights."

"Thank you," Fay said, "I'd forgotten," and she tugged at the wet gloves until she had pulled them off. The waiter brought her a plate of roast-beef and a cup of coffee and Fay began her supper at once, but the woman across the table seemed to be in no hurry, and insisted on continuing the conversation.

"I've never seen you here at Dorin's before," she suggested.

"No," Fay said, "I work farther up-town."

"Work?" the woman repeated.

"Yes. I'm in the show at the Knickerbocker."

"What do you think of that," said the woman, "a regular actress! May God help you, I say! I was in the show business myself once, but never again. I traveled night and day with Murray's *Oriental Blondes* for two seasons. That's a fine profession! Look what it's brought me to—eating at Dorin's with a lot of greasy chauffeurs and drunken night-hawk drivers. But now I'm independent—I lead my own life, bad as it may be, and I'll give it to you straight, it's no worse than when I was an actress with Murray's *Oriental Blondes*. There's no stage-manager living can tell me now what I must do and what I mustn't do."

With a tremor that ran through her whole body Fay looked at the woman's rouged cheeks and fishy meaningless eyes, and then glanced at the clock over the cashier's desk. It was already half-past seven—the hour at which she should have reported at the theater—and so she hurriedly drank her coffee, and asked the waiter for the check.

The woman looked at her, chuckled, and continued slowly to stir the coffee in her own huge cup of heavy cracked china.

"There you are," she said, as Fay rose quickly from the table, "rushing off with only half your din-

ner finished, while I sit here and enjoy my demitasse at my elegant leisure. Good night to you, dearie," she called to her derisively, "and good luck to you."

It was a quarter to eight when Fay reached the stage door, and to her great distress she met Sedley, Morley's assistant, on the stairs leading to her dressing-room. Sedley deliberately put his hand on the balustrade and his arm blocked her way.

"Late again, eh, Miss Clayton?" he snapped at her. "If it wasn't that half a dozen of the girls are off to-night I wouldn't let you go on at all. Some of you dames is altogether too good for this business."

Fay turned and looked him evenly in the eyes.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Sedley, I can't bribe you the way some of the girls do," she said, "but I can't afford it. I'm not that kind of a girl. Do I go on or not? Have it your own way—it's up to you."

The young man whistled softly and shrugged his shoulders. "Sure," he said, "I told you to go on to-night. But the next time you're late you won't go on. You won't go on that night or any night after that. Do you get me?"

With a sneer he dropped his arm, and Fay, white

from rage and fear, and without looking at him again, hurried on to the dressing-room.

Fay's performance that night was but a shadow of what it had been earlier in the season. With the aid of her make-up box it was easy enough to conceal the pale cheeks and the shadows under the eyes, but the enthusiasm and the animal spirits of youth were conspicuously absent, and the fact that Morley and Sedley were constantly watching her from the entrances did not tend to improve her performance. Over and over again she thought: "If I could only escape from the awful glare of those footlights—if I could only get away from those rows and rows of grinning faces." But she knew only too well that she could not get away. She needed every penny of her salary; she could not even afford the luxury of staying off for a night or two as so many of the girls did. This would not only mean the loss of her pay, but, unpopular as she now was with Morley and his assistant, she thoroughly realized that, in all probability, it would result in her immediate dismissal.

And then her thoughts would suddenly fly back to her visit to Fielding's rooms and to her gratuitous insults to his friends. She would try to remember

all of the miserable cheap lies she had told of her life, and the memory of every word that she had spoken would cut like a knife. Suffering from fever, and several times very near to fainting, she somehow fought her way through the long performance and changed to her street clothes. At the stage door there was the usual crowd of loafers and young men waiting for their girl friends, but quite sure that there was no one waiting for her, with lowered head, she hurried on her way. Just at the edge of the crowd she was conscious that some one was blocking her way, and looking up she saw Fielding. After the disastrous events of the afternoon she had already decided that in all probability she would never see him again, and her surprise at finding him waiting for her was as great as the real thrill of pleasure she felt at the warmth of his greeting.

"Hello, Fay," he said, "I came around to bring you a message from Miss Wilmerding. What do you say to going somewhere for a bite of supper?"

She looked at him, and her eyes told better than any words how sincerely glad she was to see him.

"I'm so glad you came," she said, "but I'm not going out at all these days. I meet Doris at the Casino every night now and we go straight home.

Perhaps you'll walk around there with me? Oh, Porter, I'm so glad to see you! I made such a fool of myself this afternoon, but I was nervous and tired out—I haven't been very well lately."

"I know that. Fay, dear, you look all run down. Miss Wilmerding understood perfectly and she sent me around to ask you if you wouldn't let her come to see you some time to-morrow."

It was but a few blocks to the Casino, but they walked very slowly, and before they had reached the stage door, where they found Doris waiting, Fielding had arranged that Miss Wilmerding was to call on Fay the following afternoon.

There had been but few callers admitted to Fay's new home. Therefore the visit of any one so distinguished as Miss Blanche Wilmerding, the daughter of the millionaire banker, David Wilmerding, was, at least in the eyes of Doris and her grandfather, a matter of the very greatest import. Both of them protested at first that they should not appear at all during the visit but remain discreetly hidden in the dining-room. But Fay would not consent to this, and insisted that it was not only her pleasure, but distinctly proper that they should be in the sitting-

room to receive her guest, and that they could retire afterward if they chose.

Mr. Hooker was especially pleased at this arrangement and arose early the next morning to prepare his toilet. This consisted in brushing his one suit of clothes, laying out a fresh shirt and sending Doris to a neighboring barber-shop for a paper collar and a necktie, to both of which luxuries he had long been a stranger. By eight o'clock he was completely dressed and ready for Miss Wilmerding's call, which was to take place at five in the afternoon. It was at his own suggestion, however, that during the intervening hours, he should smoke his pipe in his bedroom so that the air of the sitting-room should be as free as possible from the fumes of the very rank tobacco to which continued poverty had addicted him.

The two girls spent the morning scrubbing and dusting and making the little place as clean as possible, but they could no more do away with the garish vulgarity of the furniture of the sitting-room than they could with the four flights of dark and narrow stairs that it was necessary for their guest to climb to reach it. Doris was busily burnishing a tea-cup,

but Fay had apparently grown tired of the preparations and was staring idly out of the window.

"I wonder," Doris exclaimed excitedly, "if she'll come in a taxi or one of her own cars with a limousine top?"

Fay shook her head and stifled a yawn. "I don't know, Doris, dear, and to tell you the truth, I don't care very much."

"Why, Fay," Doris cried in genuine surprise, "I think it's fine of her to come to see you. Don't you?"

"Why, yes," Fay said, "I suppose, in a way, it is, but at best it's a kind of charity. What can it lead to?—Nothing. Last night I was pleased with the idea, because, I suppose, I'd have been pleased at anything. I was so glad to see Porter I could have cried—I did very nearly."

"Wasn't he nice to you?" Doris asked.

"Yes, he was nice to me last night, after she had told him to be. He wasn't very glad to see me at his place. That was a mistake, that visit. I never should have gone back. If I hadn't been such a fool I would have telephoned before I started. I can see things as they really were, now—this morning. Doris he was ashamed of me—ashamed of me and ashamed

of my profession. That's why this girl is coming to call—she's sorry for me."

"You're morbid," Doris shot at her. "You've got things all twisted, and you won't get them straight until you get over this fit of nerves. You want to look out for yourself, Fay, or you'll break down altogether."

Fay shook her head. "That's all right, kid; I won't break down. But I'm right about this girl's visit. What can we have in common—nothing, nothing at all. At Pleasantville it was different. We both played tennis on the same courts, and danced at the same dances, and knew the same men."

"You both know Porter Fielding now," Doris suggested.

Fay nodded, and then smiled and shrugged her shoulders.

"That's true, too," she said. "Perhaps that's the reason she's coming to call."

Doris got up and in silence arranged the cups on the little table where Fay was to serve the tea. Then she turned to her friend: "I wouldn't say that if I were you, Fay. It isn't like you."

Fay walked over and looked down at the carefully

arranged little tea-table. "Thank you, Doris," she said, "and thank you for all the trouble you've taken about this call. But I don't want her to call. Mark my words, no good can come of it. She's always stood in my way, and now that I'm down and out, she's coming here with her furs and her jewels to gloat over me. I hate her."

"I know you do," Doris laughed, "but just the same she'll be here pretty soon, so go into your bedroom and cool off your face. And for the love of Heaven, don't be a fool."

Notwithstanding the four flights of stairs, Miss Wilmerding arrived in the most excellent spirits, and her fragile flower-like beauty, as well as the cheeriness of her manner, made an immediate and delightfully favorable impression on both Doris and her grandfather. Indeed, it was to the latter that the visitor chose to address the greater part of her conversation, until, very much against his will, Doris led him from the room. When they were gone Miss Wilmerding sat in a large rocking-chair, and Fay took her place at the improvised tea-table.

"What a wonderful old man!" Blanche exclaimed. "He reminds me so much of some one."

"Yes," Fay said, "Mr. Hooker fancies he rather

resembles the pictures of Noah. He's quite a philosopher in his way. I'm indebted to him for much excellent advice—although I have not always followed it. I'm afraid it's rather a lonely life that he leads here."

"Lonely," Miss Wilmerding repeated, "with Miss Yorke and yourself near? I should think that most men would envy him." She glanced about the little sitting-room. "And such a comfortable pretty home, too."

Fay looked at her visitor and smilingly shook her head. "Thank you," she said. "It's a furnished flat—the green plush furniture with the flowered panels was not of our choosing."

Fay was not making it easy for Miss Wilmerding, but the latter had come with the distinct purpose of making the girl her friend, and she would not so easily be denied.

"I was so glad to meet you yesterday," she ran on. "Now that you have settled in town I thought how pleasant it would be if we could see something of each other."

"You're very good," Fay said. "Won't you have some tea?"

As if to give an air of greater sociability to the

occasion, Blanche began slowly to pull off her gloves.

"Why, yes," she said, "I should like some tea very much. And what wonderful-looking biscuits those are!"

"Yes, they are nice," Fay admitted. "Doris made them. We divide the post of cook, but Doris is so much better than I am that she does all the hot bread and pastry work."

For a moment there was silence while Fay poured the tea, and then Blanche began again.

"You've known Mr. Fielding for a long time, haven't you? I remember you were great friends at Pleasantville."

"Yes, we were great friends," Fay said with a strong accent on the were. "You see we grew up together, almost as brother and sister. Then Porter came to town and went into business, and in a short time I followed him. And I went on the stage."

"Wasn't it splendid," Miss Wilmerding exclaimed, "you're both being able to start in the same town!"

Fay glanced at Blanche and then back to the tea-cups. "Yes, in a way, it was. But, of course, you see we are both working now and our interests are

different and—and our friends are not the same.”

“But why shouldn’t they be the same?” Blanche asked.

“I don’t know exactly why,” Fay said, “but it doesn’t seem to work out, somehow. When I went on the stage I thought everything would be just the same, but it isn’t. It’s quite different. You see, Porter has been very successful and he has had the time, too, to make new friends.”

“Hasn’t he, though!” Miss Wilmerding exclaimed with genuine enthusiasm. “I think it’s quite wonderful, the place he has made for himself, and especially in so short a time. All the men and women think he’s fine, and he’s asked about everywhere now. We’re very proud of him.”

“Proud?” Fay asked.

Miss Wilmerding flushed at the suddenness of the question, and then hurried on.

“Yes, you see, dad and I sort of took him under our wing when he came to New York, and in a way, we felt responsible; so when he won out we were naturally pleased—just as you must feel pleased.”

“Of course,” Fay said, “I understand. I’m glad he’s been such a success. It’s nice to see one’s friends get on in the world, even if—”

"And you're going to be a great success, too, aren't you?" Blanche interrupted her as if she foresaw what Fay was about to say. "I suppose we shall soon see your name in a big electric sign on Broadway, won't we?"

Fay looked up from the tea-cup she was holding in her hand. "I hope so," she said, "but it seems to be a pretty hard road to success on the stage. Must you go?"

Miss Wilmerding had risen and was putting on her gloves.

"I'm afraid I must," she said. "I just wanted to look you up and ask you to be sure to come and see me. You will come very soon, won't you?"

Fay looked at the bright eager eyes of the girl, the pink and white skin, and the broad clear brow, as yet unruffled by a single real care or trouble.

"Thank you," she said. "I'd be glad to come, Miss Wilmerding, but just now it's—well, it's not possible."

"Why, Miss Clayton," Blanche urged, "please don't say that. Surely you can run in to see me some afternoon, and then we can arrange for a little party—just you and Porter and myself, or a big party, if you'd rather."

Fay's eyes were becoming a little misty, but she looked steadily into those of her visitor.

"I'd rather you'd understand, Miss Wilmerding," she said, "just why I don't come to see you. It makes it more simple for the future. I don't go anywhere, because just now I can't. It's not an easy thing to say, but I've no clothes, and I have no money—and I don't belong any more. I'm out of it. This old man and the girl you just met are my only friends, and my acquaintances are the kind of people you wouldn't care to meet." She turned her eyes from Blanche and glanced about the room. "And this," she added, "is my home. Miss Wilmerding, believe me, the girl who comes to this town with nothing but her good looks had better be dead."

Blanche put out her hand. "Good-by, Miss Clayton," she said, "that is, if it is to be good-by. But before I go, I want to tell you, if you don't mind, how I admire the fight you are making and—and I think it's bully and that you are just fine!"

Fay led the way in silence through the narrow hallway, and after she had opened the front door, once more shook hands with her visitor. "Good-by again," she said, "and thank you so much for coming."

"I'm sorry it's to be good-by," Miss Wilmerding said, "perhaps you'll change your mind some day. I hope so, anyhow. Say good-by to Mr. Hooker for me, won't you, and to Miss Yorke and thank her so much for the biscuits."

Fay bowed her head and when she raised it again Miss Wilmerding was lost in the shadows of the gloomy hallway, and the luckless, profitless visit was at an end.

CHAPTER X

OWING to his long wait in anticipation of the visit of the distinguished guest rather than to the visit itself, Mr. Hooker, completely exhausted, had fallen asleep in his bedroom, and when Fay returned to the sitting-room, she found Doris enjoying the luxurious comforts of her grandfather's chair.

"Well," asked Doris, "did she like my biscuits? I'll bet she never tasted anything like them in her Fifth Avenue palace—better, perhaps, but nothing just like them."

Fay went over to the window in front of which Doris sat, and leaning against the frame, looked out on the ill-lighted gloomy street.

"She liked them all right," Fay said. "Told me to tell you so and to thank you."

"Good for her," Doris laughed. "I rather like your friend, and my! but that was some fur coat she had on. If an actress wore a coat like that they'd suspect every Pittsburgh millionaire in the iron busi-

ness. Did your friend tell you why she came to call?"

"Oh, I don't know," Fay said, still looking out of the window, "just to be sociable I guess. Anyhow, I found out what I wanted to know."

"And that was?"

"She loves Porter."

Doris pushed herself forward to the edge of the chair. Even if Fay had never told her she knew that Fielding was the best part of her friend's life.

"How do you know that?"

Fay shook her head, and with misty eyes looked up at the darkening skies. "I could hear it in her voice when she spoke his name. It was in her eyes—I tell you it was in her eyes."

"But it wasn't in her eyes," Doris asked, "that Fielding loves *her*, was it?"

"No," Fay said, "but do you think Porter or any other man could, or would, refuse that pretty sweet thing and all that she brings with her? I don't. Especially Porter, who was born ambitious, and all of his life has been crazy for just the things that that girl can give him."

Doris put out her hands and gently pressed Fay's hand that hung limply by her side.

"I'm sorry, dear," she said, "so very sorry."

"Thank you, kid," Fay whispered. "I know. I know how you feel, but it's over. And isn't it a pity, dear, when it's over and when you know it's over?"

Half an hour later when old Mr. Hooker came into the room he found them still at the window and Doris in his favorite chair, bending over Fay, who was sitting at her feet with her face buried in the younger girl's lap.

Blanche Wilmerding returned to her home thoroughly discouraged at her futile efforts to establish any kind of friendly relations between herself and Fay Clayton. But although she had failed so signally, she could not bring herself to feel that the fault was in any way her own. If she had erred at all it was in going out of her way to do a favor where it was not appreciated, and where the motive of the kindly act was entirely misunderstood. Annoyed and distressed at her lack of success she dressed and went down to the drawing-room to wait for Fielding, who was coming to dinner.

The gaieties of the winter season were not yet under way, and of late Fielding usually dined alone with Miss Wilmerding and her father several times during the week. Occasionally they all went to the

play together, but more often Mr. Wilmerding retired to his den, and Blanche and Fielding would spend the evening chatting in the library up-stairs which had all the comforts and none of the stiffness of the big formal drawing-rooms on the lower floor. In every way the Wilmerdings had made Fielding feel that their home was to be a home to him, too, and he accepted their kindness with proper gratitude and a very natural avidity. On this particular evening Mr. Wilmerding was going out to a dinner, and Blanche was greatly pleased at the prospect. The memory of her unhappy call on Fay still hung heavy over her, and she wished to tell Fielding all about it and at once.

He came in smiling and took her proffered hand in both of his own.

"Well," he asked, "tell me all about it."

"Porter," she said, "it was awful."

"Awful," he repeated. "What was the matter? Was the flat so bad or was it that terrible old man?"

Blanche shook her head at Fielding's lack of understanding and sympathy, and an apparently decided inclination to take the matter lightly.

"I tell you it was awful. She refused to come to see me or have anything to do with me, and I

tried so hard to be nice and friendly to her. Indeed, I did, Porter. She said it was her poverty, but that's not the real reason. There's something else."

"I'm so sorry I let you go at all, Blanche," he said, "but how was I to know that Fay would act like that?"

"Sorry for me," Blanche repeated. "Don't be sorry for me—I tell you that girl is a tragedy. Oh, Porter, if you could only have seen the place. It was so cheap and vulgar and the plush furniture and the awful wall-paper fairly screamed at you, and she looked so poor and so tired and—and hungry. Yes, Porter, she did, I tell you, she looked hungry."

Fielding smiled and shook his head.

"Oh, it is not so bad as that," he said. "You're a little carried away by your sympathy. I'll go up there to-morrow and have a good talk with Fay and find out just what the trouble is. If I wasn't such a selfish brute I'd have done it long ago."

Any further conversation on the subject was impossible for the moment as the servant announced dinner, and it was not until they were once more comfortably settled in the library that Blanche had again spoken of her fruitless visit of the afternoon. She was sitting before the fire on the edge of a low

armchair, her elbows on her knees and her chin resting between her palms. Fielding sat tailor-fashion on a great white bear-skin at her feet and watched the flames in the broad hearth throw shadows across the delicate pink and white face, the sensitive appealing eyes, and the masses of golden-yellow hair. About them there was nothing that was not beautiful—every detail of the room spoke of good breeding, and good taste, and unlimited wealth. And then, too, both of them had youth and abundant health, and spirits, and unusual good looks, and Fielding, at least, had not always known the extreme comfort of such luxury as this. It was, in all ways, a moment when the thoughts of two such happy contented young people would naturally turn to those less fortunate than themselves. They had tried and tried hard to account for Fay's attitude from many different angles. Blanche had spoken of the girl's present unhappy position at great length and with the most friendly and sincere concern, and Fielding had talked freely of the days when Fay and he had been so constantly together.

"Porter," Blanche said, "it's not an easy question to ask, and don't answer it if you'd rather not. But in a way it might account for Fay's position. Didn't

you use to—to care a great deal about her at one time?”

“Why, yes,” Fielding answered quite frankly. “I do still, although lately I’ve seen so very little of her. If you mean was I ever in love with Fay, to be honest, I don’t think that I ever really was.”

Blanche shaded her eyes with her hand, and for some moments stared in silence at the points of flame shooting up from the crackling logs.

“Isn’t it just possible,” she said at last, “that—well, that she cares for you? You were her best friend once and now—”

“And now,” Fielding interrupted her, “you mean that you are my best friend.”

There was something in his voice and in his eyes that confused her and made her sorry for what she had said. She pushed herself back into the depths of the low chair and for a moment closed her eyes. When she opened them again she found Fielding standing over her, and then he reached for her hand which was gripping the arm of the chair, and raising it, brushed the tips of her fingers with his lips.

“Blanche,” he whispered, “I wish with all my

heart that some woman, any woman, had the right to be jealous of me."

Again she closed her eyes, and with her free hand clasped the other arm of the chair.

"I know I have no right—I know it's quite mad of me—but—"

She opened her eyes and in their depths, where there was no place for subterfuge, and where one could look only for the fearless truth, he saw the answer to his unasked question. And so he bent over her still lower, so low that his lips touched hers. Then he stood quite erect and jerked his chin in the air, and threw back his shoulders, as all true conquerors should do, and at that moment the door opened and Mr. Wilmerding bustled in.

"Well, young people," he cried, "how are you? I've been bored as I've never been bored before, even at a banker's banquet."

"Speaking for myself," Fielding said, "I've never been so happy before in my life. Mr. Wilmerding, I've just asked your daughter to marry me."

The banker glared at Fielding with wide-eyed wonder.

"Bless my soul," he gasped, "but this is very sudden—at least it is to me. What did Blanche say?"

The girl walked over to Fielding and put her arm through his.

"Blanche really didn't say anything," she said, smiling frankly into her father's startled eyes, "but *that's* all right. Porter understands."

A few minutes later Mr. Wilmerding pushed an electric button and when the butler appeared he ordered a bottle of champagne and three glasses. Just as the servant was closing the door, Wilmerding added: "And some cake. I don't know why they have cake on these occasions, but according to the best novels they always do, and you two have got to eat cake if it chokes you."

Thus it was that Fielding and Blanche Wilmerding were betrothed. During the ensuing talk it was agreed between them and the banker that the event should be celebrated by Porter taking a vacation the day following and spending it alone with Blanche in the back seat of Mr. Wilmerding's largest touring car.

"We'll drive all morning," Blanche planned excitedly, "and for lunch we'll go to one of those rather risqué inns, and we'll lunch all alone and create a terrible scandal."

"No, we won't," Fielding protested, "because no-

body will know about it. I positively refuse to lunch where there will be any one to see us."

The happy party of three said good night, in fact they said it several times in the library, and then, with a prematurely wifely spirit, Blanche went to the front door for fear, as she explained it, that Fielding would not put on his overcoat and hat before going out into the cold night air.

The door once closed behind him, Fielding lighted a cigar, and with his shoulders back, his head held high, he started with a long swinging gait down the avenue in the direction of his home. Good fortune had indeed been his. In less than six months' time it seemed as if every one of his ambitions and his hopes had been realized. The future lay before him as fair and as unruffled as a well of crystal water. Health, the best of all nature's gifts, had been his from childhood; to this had been added a secure and honorable position; and now through his marriage to Blanche Wilmerding, his last fear of need or any lack of this world's goods would vanish forever.

He looked up at the silver stars shining coldly down on him from the unbroken stretch of purple sky and thanked his God that he had lived cleanly, and, to himself, made silent oath that he would live

worthily of her love always. And then, at the thought of her love for him, there was a sudden tightening of the muscles in his throat and he felt the hot blood rush to his face. Because she gave him not only her love, but with it every desire of his most ambitious dreams, and he knew only too well that the one thing which he ought to give her in return for all this was his love, and that he could not give.

To the full Fielding appreciated the girl's undoubted charm, her wonderful sweetness, and her frail exquisite beauty, but he did not love her—not as he wanted to love her, not as he had prayed and would pray again that he might love her. That she could or ever would discover his secret did not for one moment occur to him as a remote possibility. He was quite sure that he would prove himself the best of husbands, better perhaps than many of the men whom he knew, and who, years after marriage, still loved their wives with all the tenderness and passion of the early days of their courtship.

It was not that at the moment Fielding loved any one else, but he knew well enough what real love was—the kind of love which he should have brought to a woman so fine and unselfish as Blanche Wilmerding. Perhaps it was to Fay Clayton more than to

any other woman that he owed his understanding of real love. His desire of the old days to protect and guard her had been instilled into him through years of devoted companionship, and yet in spite of his brotherly attitude there had been moments when her wonderful animal beauty had fairly overwhelmed him, and he would have given everything he possessed to have crushed her for one moment in his arms. But that was the Porter Fielding and the Fay Clayton of Pleasantville, when they lived under stretches of blue sky, and their existence was as human as it was clean and beautiful. Much had happened since those days of Arcadian joys, much worldly knowledge had been learned by both of them, and even had it been their greatest desire, never again could they enjoy the innocent pleasures of their joyous irresponsible youth.

But Porter Fielding's regrets for the lack of sincerity of his own feelings were far outweighed by happier thoughts of the culmination of his hopes which had been so suddenly and unexpectedly realized that night. By the time he had reached his home he was smiling again and was thoroughly content and at peace with himself and all the world. In the brass box in the hallway he found a letter that

had evidently been left by a messenger, and when he had carried it to his sitting-room, and turned on the lights, he saw that the address was in Fay's handwriting. These were the words she had written in her brief note:

"Dear Porter:

"You may remember that on the last night we were together at Pleasantville—the night before I left to come to New York—I asked you to make me a promise. It was that, never mind what might happen, you would bring me to Pleasantville whenever I asked you, and you made the promise. I am leaving to-morrow morning on the ten-forty from Twenty-third Street and shall arrange things so that we can return by an afternoon train. I shall meet you in the outside waiting-room of the station as pay-day is not until to-morrow and I don't think I'll have quite money enough to buy my ticket. So you see that your coming, even apart from your promise, is imperative. Au revoir. As ever,

"FAY."

Fielding read the note the first time hurriedly and while he still stood under the chandelier. Then he sat down and read and reread it slowly several times. His first feelings were of great surprise and consternation, and the more he considered Fay's request the greater his consternation grew. It seemed not only thoughtless but most inconsiderate and alto-

gether unlike her to ask him to do her such a favor at such a time. Of course, Fielding realized that she could not be expected to know of his engagement to Blanche Wilmerding, or with what keen pleasure both he and the girl he was to marry were looking forward to the long day that they were to spend together on the morrow. But Fay did know that Saturday was at best only a half-holiday and that under circumstances less unusual it would have been imperative for him to have been at the office during the morning hours at least. On the other hand the fact that Fay herself had a *matinée* the following afternoon seemed conclusive proof that she regarded her visit to Pleasantville as not only extremely urgent but of the greatest possible importance.

But worry and fume over the matter as he might Fielding could not argue against the two vital facts, that he had made a promise and that he had been asked, and asked in no uncertain terms, to make that promise good. His first idea was to telephone Blanche at once and to lay the whole matter before her, but on second thought he decided that she had no doubt already gone to bed, and that there would be no one down-stairs to answer the call and switch it to Blanche's telephone in her own room. Should

he wish to do so there would be plenty of time to telephone her in the morning before he started to meet Fay. But then he remembered that conversations over the telephone were not only not always satisfactory but frequently led to misunderstandings and, therefore, his final decision was to write her a brief note. This he did at once, merely stating that he had been called out of town on imperative business, the nature of which he could better tell her on his return that evening. In a few carefully chosen words he ended the letter by assuring her that when she knew the circumstances she would not only forgive him but agree with him that he had done the only thing possible.

The morning following he sent the letter by messenger to Miss Wilmerding and then went on to the station to meet Fay. He found her waiting at the door of the ferry house, and when she saw him she hurried to him, laughing, and dangling an empty purse before his eyes.

"I'm broke, Porter," she said, "stony broke! That's a pretty way to go back to the old town, isn't it?"

Porter smiled, shook his head with mock solemnity at the vacuous purse, and started toward the

ticket-window. Fay put her arm under his, and notwithstanding the crowd that surrounded them, absolutely refused to be quieted.

"Just think of it, Porter," she cried, eagerly squeezing his arm, "we're going back—back to dear old Pleasantville. You've run away from business and I'm going to cut the matinée and probably get fired, but we're going home, aren't we, we're going home!" She suddenly swung herself before him so that she could look fairly into his serious eyes. "Smile a little, Porter," she begged—"just a little smile. Let's pretend we're a couple of kids playing hooky from school! That's it, Porter, let's be kids again just for a day—just for a few hours. Won't you, please?"

Fielding looked squarely into the lovely blue eyes. They were laughing eager eyes now—the same eyes that he had known months ago—months before the glare of the footlights and the white lights of the town had dulled them and brought sorrow to their limpid depths. The shadows, too, had gone from her face—the white drawn look had vanished, and in its place was the flush of the old lovely pink and white coloring. In Fay this morning Fielding saw the Fay of the days when she and he were always

together, sailing over the rippling waters of the Natasqua, or taking long walks through the sweet-smelling pine forests, or along stretches of hard white pebbled beach. Here was the Fay of yesterday, a laughing, winsome, beautiful, joyous playmate, the Fay with whom he had grown up, and learned to love as he would have loved a sister.

It would have taken a stronger man than Porter Fielding to have been indifferent to the charm of Fay Clayton that morning. She seemed, somehow, to be an integral part of the brilliant crisp December day, the kind of a day that sends the blood racing through the veins and makes one long for the broad blue sky, the brittle roads and the sunlit forest of the country of early winter. The annoyance that Fielding had previously nourished against her on account of her request vanished before her irresistible spirit as the mist disappears before the warm glow of the summer sun. He knew that Blanche Wilmerding had a great sympathy for Fay, and thoroughly convinced that she would not only forgive him but be glad that he had kept his promise, he gave himself up to the happiness he once more felt in the presence of his old friend. Her laugh was as infectious as was the very spirit of her gaiety,

and as the train carried them slowly on their way, they laughed and chatted together, heedless of everything and every one but themselves, and as content as two happy children. Fay told him of her experiences at the theater and at the new flat uptown, but they were all amusing experiences. If Fielding were to accept these tales as the whole truth, then the girls in the company were a witty, care-free and most lovable crowd, and old man Hooker was to Fay and Doris a source of never-ending delight. Not for a moment did she dwell on her true life, somber, almost tragic in its very monotony, and stripped bare of happiness of every kind.

It was when the way-train swung about the curve that brought it in sight of the sea that Fielding noticed the first change in Fay's mood. For the moment her spirits seemed to sag, her amusing ceaseless chatter came to a sudden end. She sat silent, looking out at the little villages of summer cottages, the long stretches of gray sand-dunes, and between these at intervals, a patch of deep blue sea and high rolling breakers. It was a bleak view she had from the window—so bleak, and gray, and out-of-season that even the brilliant sunshine could not warm it into cheerfulness. The wooden cottages were all

closed tight and boarded for the winter, and the broad clay streets were quite deserted—it seemed as if the owner of the coast had locked the door and gone away and left only the high white-crested breakers to guard his home.

When Fay had left Pleasantville, six months before, the same narrow strip of land had been alive with young men in flannels, hatless pretty girls in duck skirts and filmy shirt-waists, automobiles, and runabouts, and summer “hacks”; the grass was green then, and everywhere there were blooming flowers, and the spirit of the summer holiday was in the air. But the sight of the closed villas, the deserted streets, the occasional lonely pine tree did not hurt Fay as it would have hurt the vision of the traveler who looked out on the desolation of the Jersey coast in winter for the first time. Because, every now and again, Fay recognized some landmark—a house, or a broken fence, a garden, an isolated clump of pines—that told her that she was being brought nearer and nearer to her old home. Being of a much less emotional temperament, this return did not affect Fielding in the same way as it did the girl, but at least he appreciated the thoughts that were passing through her mind, and so he re-

mained silent and let her dream on her own foolish sentimental dreams.

As the train gradually drew near Pleasantville and the more frequent became the landmarks that Fay recognized, the more intense became her interest and not for a moment now did she take her eyes from the passing landscape. At last the train slowed down perceptibly, and they both knew that that meant they were about to cross the old wooden bridge that spanned the Natasqua. Fay was the first to catch a glimpse of the blue sunlit waters of the fair little river on which they had spent the best part of their youth. As the train rumbled slowly across the draw she closed her eyes for a moment, and resting her head against the back of the seat, pressed her arm tightly against Fielding's and her fingers closed like a vise about his wrist.

"It's the Natasqua, Porter," she whispered, "it's the dear old Natasqua. We're home again, Porter, we're home."

Until this time neither of them had mentioned the object of their present visit to Pleasantville, but now it seemed necessary for Fielding to speak.

"Do you expect any one to meet you?" he asked.

Fay opened her eyes and once more stared out of

the window. They had crossed the bridge and were running through a strip of pine woods that lay just beyond the edge of the town.

"No, Porter," she said, "I wasn't expecting any one to meet me."

"I thought perhaps," he suggested, "that Margaret—"

Fay shook her head. "No, not even Margaret. You see Margaret doesn't answer my letters any more. I wrote to her several times after—after the trouble, but she didn't write at all to me after that. I think it hurt me almost more than anything else, Porter. We'd been so close, Margaret and I—and then I'd always sort of looked after her, and I thought, somehow, that she'd be sure to stick, even if the others did fail me."

"Yes, or course," Fielding said, "I understand and I'm sorry. It doesn't seem like Margaret, does it? Had you any plans, that is, plans for after we arrive—any idea of what you wanted to do?"

Fay turned from the window and looked at him through misty eyes. Her brave brilliant spirits of the early morning had disappeared entirely.

"Why, no, Porter," she said, "I had no plans. I just felt somehow that I had to go back to the old

place. I was heartsick for a sight of it, and last night it seemed as if I couldn't stay away any longer. Of course I wanted to be with you when I came back, but I didn't know how to ask you exactly, and then I remembered the promise you made me. That was a funny premonition—how I knew some day that I'd want you to bring me back here."

With a great creaking of rusty brakes, the train slowly came to a stop before the station. As Fay and Fielding stepped from the car to the platform, the station master waved his greeting to them just as if they had left Pleasantville the day before, and a driver, whom they both knew, inquired casually if they wanted to hire his hack. But Fay said that she preferred to walk, and so they left the station and strolled slowly across the road. At Fielding's suggestion they stopped in at a little restaurant where they ordered some sandwiches and milk for their luncheon. The woman who owned the place received Fielding with a boisterous welcome, but when she recognized Fay she gave her a quick nod and hurried on into the kitchen.

"Do you suppose they all feel that way?" Fay asked.

But Fielding pretended not to understand and be-

gan to talk of other things. The woman soon returned with the sandwiches and milk, and without again glancing at Fay, left them alone. They ate their simple luncheon in silence and when they had finished Fay went outside while Fielding paid the woman.

They walked slowly down the broad street in the direction of the river. It was the hour when the very few who spent their winters in Pleasantville stopped work for their midday dinner and there was absolutely no one in sight. The cottages which for the most part were used only by the summer visitors were closed and the windows and doors boarded, a sharp breeze from the ocean blew through the naked branches of the trees, and gloom and desolation seemed to brood over the deserted village. Fay buttoned the collar of her coat tightly about her throat and unconsciously they quickened their footsteps.

They turned from the main roadway into a path that led them to a pavilion and the public boat-house where Fay had always kept her sailboat. The big, gray, barn-like structure was closed and locked for the winter, but they sat down on a wooden bench and looked out at the sparkling waters of the Natasqua. For a long time neither of them spoke. Per-

haps more than any other place the river recalled to them the joyous happy days of their youth, and both were conscious of the same thought, the thought that each knew filled the other's mind. The river, unchanged, peaceful and beautiful, still flowed on its way to the sea, but since they had last seen that river what changes had come into their lives! Fay shivered slightly from the cold, and getting up from the bench, took several quick turns up and down the porch of the pavilion.

"And now?" Fielding asked.

"Now," Fay said, "I think I'd like to go and look at the old house. Do you mind coming with me? I won't go very near."

Fielding smiled at her and put his arm through hers, and they started briskly to walk toward the Claytons' home. The sun had disappeared behind some fat gray clouds, the wind from the sea had freshened, and the air was growing cold and raw. They turned from the broad street into a wood road and it was through a break in the trees that Fay caught the first glimpse of her old home. They could distinguish the figure of a woman standing on the porch, but they were too far away to recognize the woman's face.

"It's Margaret, I think," Fay said. "I'm sure it's Margaret. Don't you think so, Porter?"

Her manner was so eager that Fielding quickly assured her that she was right. She leaned against a pine tree and for some moments, with her hands clasped tightly before her, gazed steadily at the figure of the girl on the porch.

"I'm glad you think it's Margaret," she at last. "I like to think that I saw Margaret again. Margaret was such a dear kid, wasn't she, Porter?"

Suddenly Fay stood up very straight, threw her shoulders sharply back, and with one more glance at the little gray cottage, turned her face from it.

"And now, Porter," she said, "I want you to take me to the ocean. We must see the ocean together again, mustn't we? And then that will be the last favor I shall ask of you, and you can go back to your beloved New York."

"But you're going back with me?" he asked.

Fay smiled and nodded her head.

"Why, yes, of course, I'm going back. In a way, I'd like to stay on, but it doesn't seem possible. I've got to get back to the theater for the performance this evening, and then there's really no place for me to spend the night here now; is there?"

"No," he said, "I suppose not. I'm sorry."

After this they walked on in silence toward the road that led to the sea, and Fay seemed to become more and more depressed with every step they took. To Fielding the whole visit to Pleasantville was still an enigma, and he could not understand the melancholy pleasure that Fay had evidently anticipated in returning to her old home. Under other circumstances her desire to go back to her people and the scenes of her youth was only natural, but at the present her people did not want to see her, and the only object of her present trip, as far as Fielding could understand it, was to stir up memories that he believed had best have been forgotten entirely.

From the woods they turned into the broad roadway that ran straight to the ocean. Like all the other highways it was quite deserted; the semi-detached villas that lined it on either side were vacant and had ugly rough boards nailed across the doors and windows; the bushes and flower beds of the little gardens were cold and barren-looking, and many of the tiny fenced lawns were strewn with tin cans, empty bottles and the refuse of the summer that was gone. They walked cautiously now along the narrow wooden sidewalk, and their progress was of neces-

sity very slow, for many of the planks were broken or had rotted away entirely. At last they caught a glimpse of the ocean and by way of greeting Fay waved her hand to it and then started to run through the heavy white sand, as fast as she could, toward the beach. She called to Fielding, daring him to race her to the sea, but he was tired and anxious and was content to follow slowly.

When he caught up with her he found her sitting on the edge of the porch of a deserted wooden building known to the summer visitors as the Casino, but which in reality was a very crudely built bathing pavilion, and now quite deserted and in a deplorable state of neglect and decay. Many of the shingles of which the outer walls were made had been wrenched loose by storms; the doors of the long rows of bath-houses flapped and creaked on their rusty hinges, and the frames of two derelict bottomless rocking-chairs were rocked slowly to and fro by the wind that whistled and screeched its way across the deserted porches and through the gaping cracks of the shattered building. All trace of the brilliant sunshine of the morning was gone, and the sky was now filled with gray swiftly-moving clouds, and a sharp piercing breeze from the ocean had turned the

day bitterly cold. Fielding buttoned the collar of his overcoat tightly across his throat, and sitting down at Fay's side, swung his legs over the edge of the porch. For a long time there was silence while they looked out on the high white-crested breakers that kept on impotently smashing away their terrific power on the endless stretch of gray flinty beach, and tossing clouds of foamy spray high into the air.

It was Fay who spoke first.

"I wish it would clear," she said. "It would be fine if the sun were shining on those breakers and the spray—wouldn't it? Waves always look so grim to me in this kind of weather, so terribly grim. It was a day like this—at least Father Clayton always said it was—when I was washed up on the beach—a raw stormy day in December."

The wind was rising constantly now, and every minute it was growing colder and colder. Fielding got up and stamped his feet, but Fay sat still, her back against a pillar, her arms gathered tightly about her knees, apparently completely oblivious to the wind or cold.

"You know, Porter," she went on, "that I always called the eighth of December my birthday—the

eighth was the day I was wrecked and the Claytons took me home to live with them. I was only—”

“Why, that’s funny,” Fielding interrupted her, “but to-day’s the eighth. Did you know that?”

Fay was looking out at the long foamy crescents running far up the hard gray beach.

“Yes, Porter,” she said, but she did not turn her head toward him. “That’s why I wanted to come down here to-day—sort of an anniversary party.”

“I’m sorry I didn’t remember, Fay,” he said. “I wish I’d sent you something. Do you remember the foolish birthday gifts we used to give each other when we were very little kids? We always went together and bought them at old man Cope’s place. I’m sorry I forgot about its being your birthday to-day.”

“That’s all right,” she said, “don’t you worry, Porter. I’m glad you remembered at all. You did enough when you brought me down here—that was enough for anybody to do. I was sorry, too, that I had to ask you to pay my fare down and back, but you see, to-night is pay night at the theater, and I was broke and I couldn’t very well borrow from Doris, and poor Mr. Hooker—he hasn’t got anything at all. But that’s all right, Porter, I know

you won't be sorry for all the nice things you've done for me to-day and—and during the old times." She put out her hand and looked up at him with eyes as helpless and as innocent as those of a child.

"I know you'll be glad," she went on, "because it's good to remember those things sometimes—very good."

He held her hand tightly in both of his own, and when he looked at her, she saw a light in his eyes that she had not seen there for a long, long time.

"Don't talk like that," he said, "please don't. You don't know how it hurts. I've been a brute to you lately, and I know it, and you know it, too, kid."

She looked up at him and made a pathetic little effort to smile, but her eyes were very dim, and when she spoke there was a catch in her voice.

"My, but it's good, Porter," she said, "to hear you call me 'kid' again. It's just like the old days."

He raised his hands and laid them gently on her shoulders, but the movement instead of calming her seemed to rouse her to sudden action, and before he had time to speak, she rose quickly and stood facing him. Then she reached out and took his handkerchief from the breast pocket of his overcoat, and having dried her eyes with it, stuffed it back.

"I'm a sentimental fool, Porter," she said, "just a poor sentimental fool. When I started out this morning I took an oath to myself that I was going to be cheerful and just as amusing as I could be all day, and not to cry once, or to mope, or to be a nuisance to you. I wanted you to remember me to-day as being—well, sort of jolly, and bright, and like I used to be, and instead of that—"

Her voice trailed off and was lost in the cry of the wind tearing through the deserted pavilion.

"It's not easy to be cheerful, Fay, dear," Fielding said, trying to comfort her, "when there's nothing but ghosts about. And such ghosts as we've seen to-day! Ugh! They give me the creeps."

Fay looked Porter fairly in the eyes, and in an uncertain sort of way smiled at him.

"Porter," she said, "I'm going to see one more ghost before I go back, and if you don't mind, I think I'd rather see it by myself. I'd like to walk up the beach toward the Twin Dunes. You wouldn't care, would you?"

Fielding shook his head.

"Why, of course not, Fay," he said. "But it does seem terribly morbid, somehow."

For a few moments she looked with frightened

unseeing eyes out toward the ocean and then back to Fielding.

"I know that," she said. "I know that, Porter; but still I would like to go back and look at the old place. I can walk there in five minutes, really I can, and I won't stay but a moment. Why don't you take a walk up the beach and see how the Wilmerdings' house looks? Then you can tell Miss Wilmerding about it when you see her the next time."

"Fay," Fielding said suddenly, "why did you treat Blanche the way you did yesterday? What possible reason could you have for refusing to go to see her."

Fay shook her head and stuck her hands deep into the pockets of her long coat.

"I can't tell you that just now," she said. "It's such a long story, but—but, Porter, I'd like to ask you a question. Are you engaged to Blanche Wilmerding?"

The suddenness and unexpectedness of the question made Fielding give a little gasp, but he recovered himself at once and quickly put out his hand.

"Yes, Fay," he said, "I am engaged. Congratulate me, won't you? I want you to be the first to wish me luck."

Her worst fears had been realized, and the barrier that for months had been gradually rising between them reared before her now to impossible heights. The secret love dreams and all the hopes of her youth were over, definitely, decisively over, and now it only remained for her to be brave for just a few minutes more. With a certain timidity she had never felt before in his presence she put out her hand and laid it in his.

"I'm so glad," she said. "I think it's just fine, Porter, and I congratulate you and—and I congratulate her, too."

Fielding blushed a little, and in his heart he felt a great pleasure that it was over. As if to hide his confusion, he fumbled under his coats, and then, assuming a more practical manner, pulled out his watch.

"I'll meet you here in half an hour," he said briskly, "that will give us plenty of time to get the three-thirty back to town. Will that suit you all right?"

Fay nodded and smiled a wistful sort of smile at his boyish face and eager laughing eyes.

"Yes, that will be all right—in half an hour."



CHAPTER XI

SHE turned and started along the path that skirted the edge of the grassy sand-dunes. Fielding stood looking after her, thinking that she would turn and wave to him, but the dark figure continued to trudge slowly and laboriously through the heavy sand and gave him no sign. He decided at first that he would accept her suggestion and walk down the beach in the other direction to have a look at the Wilmerding cottage. Then he determined that such a walk would not only require considerable effort but be quite useless and that, in all ways, it would be much better for him to remain where he was. He took several quick turns up and down the wind-swept porch of the pavilion and then sat down and waited for Fay to return.

She had disappeared from sight now behind some high dunes, and his mind turned back to his own affairs and how he could best explain his sudden visit to Pleasantville to Blanche Wilmerding. It had been such a useless visit, full of unhappy mem-

ories, and now Fay had gone by herself to see more ghosts. To Fielding's practical unsentimental mind the whole day had been sadly misspent. He could not persuade himself that it was possible that Fay had come so far merely for the melancholy pleasure of visiting her old home, the doors of which were forever closed against her, and therefore, he continued mentally to grope for some legitimate reason for her sudden desire to return to Pleasantville. And then, without any apparent logical train of thought, his mind suddenly flew back to the talk they had had months before, when she had given him her reasons for wanting to go to New York and to work for her living. With a terrifying force the words that she had quoted then now rushed through his brain—"If my life be an ill thing, I can lay it down."

He sprang to his feet, and with all the speed in every fiber of his strong lithe body started to run along the path that Fay had taken. But do the best that he could his progress was very slow, for the path was deep in soft yielding sand and in many places had been washed away and completely obliterated. As he plowed his way over the dunes, often slipping and falling, he cursed himself again and

again for not having remembered her threat to end her life, and at the very place where she had now but gone. Running and half-exhausted, he began to realize for the first time the poverty of her present life and the hardships that she must have undergone; how friendless she was and, worst of all, how he, her best friend, had neglected and deserted her at a time when she most needed his help. At last he saw the Twin Dunes, the landmark of the scene of the wreck, and with redoubled effort he sped on through the crumbling sand. And then, as he hurled his tired numb body over the last hillock, and saw her still alive, he gave a great cry and running to her fell exhausted at her side. She was sitting on the sand, looking with calm steadfast eyes toward the sea, her back resting against the rib of an abandoned fishing smack. At Fielding's unexpected coming she showed no emotion at all.

"Thank God," he gasped, "I'm not too late. What have you got there?"

His whole body trembling from fear and exhaustion, he pointed to Fay's tightly closed right hand. As if in acknowledgment that she was powerless before his greater strength, she slightly shrugged her shoulders, and opening her hand, showed him a

small vial. He reached out, and taking the little blue bottle, with a great sigh of relief, tossed it into the surf.

For some moments there was silence between them while Fay still stared out at the foaming sea and Fielding lay panting for breath at her side.

"Good God, Fay," he breathed at last, "I didn't think it had come to this." His voice was trembling and he looked into her big blue eyes which he saw were dry and unafraid.

"It was the best thing, Porter," she said. "It was the only thing. I'd thought it all out."

"You're mad," he gasped; "you're sick and tired. Your brain's tired and your body's tired. You're not yourself—you're mad."

Fay shook her head and smiled at him as a mother might smile at a wayward child.

"No, Porter," she said, "I'm not mad. It wasn't as if I hadn't tried, because I *have* tried. I seem to have been a sort of an experiment that didn't work out. The waves threw me up on the beach and then they said, 'Now, let's see what you can do with yourself, and your good looks, and your red hair, but no father and no mother.' Well, I tried all right, Porter. But I tell you there's no niche for a



W. MURCAN -

With calm steadfast eyes toward the sea.

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girl like me. I suppose it's my disposition. So I came back and to-day I said to the waves: 'I was a bad job, I failed utterly, and I know I made an awful mess of it. But, notwithstanding all that, I can still say that I'm as good and clean as the night you threw me as a child on the beach, and I wanted to come back to you while I could still say that.' "

With a little regretful sigh she settled farther back against the naked ribs of the derelict.

"In five minutes," she went on, "it would have been all over. I would have been free, and you would have been free, and our troubles would have been at an end. I don't know what becomes of girls who, every minute of their lives, have to fight the too much red blood that is put into their veins, I don't know. But your future was all right, anyhow. So don't you see, Porter, you meant well but it was really a mistake. Now I've got to begin all over again and I'm not up to it. That's it—I'm not up to it. Living isn't good enough for me. I'm tired and I wanted so much to quit."

Fielding took her hands that lay idly in her lap and pressed them closely in his own.

"You're right, Fay," he whispered, "when you say that you've got to begin again, but we've both

got to begin again. This time we'll begin together and stick together, always. I know it's all been a mistake, and I know I've been a brute, but, thank God, it's not too late. I know now that we were always meant to be together, and to live together and never to separate. I know that I've been a selfish fool, and thought of nothing but my own success and cared only for the things and the people who would bring me success. I know all that. But that's all over now, Fay. You may say that it took a long time and nearly an awful tragedy to bring me to myself, and you've got every right to say it, but surely you must understand now. You must know now, Fay, dear, that I love you."

Fay gently shook her hands free and then clasped them closely together in her lap.

"Oh, Porter," she said, "it's all so hopeless now."

"Hopeless?" he repeated.

"Why, yes. You must know that I can't marry you. I'd bring you nothing but my love, and that couldn't hold you. You're ambitious and you always will be ambitious. You love position and money and all that money brings. I would only hold you back. You may love me now—to-day—I

know you do or you wouldn't tell me that you do. But really you're ashamed of me."

"Ashamed of you?" He put out his hand toward her, but with a quick movement she pushed it away from her.

"Why, yes, Porter. Have you forgotten the night at the restaurant, after the first performance, or just the other afternoon at your rooms? You were ashamed of me, and a man can't be happy with a woman he is ashamed of. There would be no more chance of happiness for us than there would be for a man who married a woman he had lived with. You love me a little, Porter, and you're terribly sorry for me, that's all." She smiled at him and then: "Help me up, won't you? We've got to be getting back to town."

When they were both on their feet he looked her squarely in the eyes.

"You mean what you say, Fay?" he asked. "To me it seems the only chance that either of us has for any happiness."

"Why, no, Porter," she said smiling, "it wouldn't do, believe me, and I know us both better now than I ever have in all my life. Just remember this. The

first time in all these years that you ever told me that you loved me was just now when you saw me at death's door, when you saved me from killing myself. That isn't love, Porter, that's pity. You have disowned me, and you have shown other people that you were ashamed of me, and that is a crime which no real woman ever forgot or ever forgave. All your love for all the rest of your life couldn't wipe out the memory of that. You must go back to Miss Wilmerding. You must forget this day—believe me—it never existed. You've got a fine successful life before you with her, and I wish you luck."

"Do you think," he asked, "that that would be fair to Miss Wilmerding? Do you think that I am going to keep my love for you a secret from her? Do you think that I have fallen so low that I am not going to tell her, as soon as I see her, just what I have said to you?"

Fay looked at him with surprised curious eyes, and held out her hand.

"Forgive me, Porter," she said. "Perhaps you're more of a man than I thought you were, and I'm so glad that you're going to do the right thing."

She turned and together they started back along the path that led to the Casino and to the road to

the station. Neither then nor later, during the long journey in the train, did either of them speak of their feelings for each other, or for any one else, or of the reason why Fay had asked him to spend the day which was to have been her last at Pleasantville.

It was six o'clock when Fay reached her apartment and found Doris and old man Hooker waiting dinner for her. At her plate there was a note from James Stuart. This was what he had written:

"DEAR MISS CLAYTON: I am giving a supper after the theater to-night at Martin's, and as suppers go, it promises to be gay and amusing—that is, if you care for this kind of a supper. Personally, I don't care for them at all, and I am giving this simply in return for others to which I was weak enough to go just because I had nothing else to do. I am only asking you because I thought that you might hear of it and think perhaps I had forgotten you. It may sound inhospitable, but I hope you won't come. You don't belong to this kind of a party, and never did. I invited Doris over the telephone in much the same genial strain in which I am writing this, and she seemed glad to refuse. I am hoping that you will agree with her. As ever,

Sincerely yours,

"JAMES ALEXANDER STUART.

"N. B. In case you should decide to go I'll have a cab waiting for you at your stage door."

Fay looked up at Doris, and their eyes met.

"It's an invitation to Stuart's party," Fay said. "You're not going?"

Doris shook her head.

"Not for me," she laughed. "Not when the man who is giving the party warns you off. I like something good to eat and a dance as well as any one, but not at that price. From here it looks like one of those things. You're not going, are you, Fay?"

Fay hesitated and slowly put the letter back into its envelope. "Yes," she said, "I was thinking of it."

There was a moment's silence, during which Mr. Hooker regarded Fay solemnly over the rims of his spectacles and Doris drew her thin lips into a hard straight line.

"Why, Fay?" she asked.

Fay shrugged her shoulders. "Why not? I've had a change of heart, Doris. I'm going back to the dances, and the suppers, and to all the fun I can squeeze out of this miserable life you and I lead. I'm tired of being good and virtuous and forgiving. The worst supper-party, or dance or whatever it is, is none too good for me now."

Doris made no answer, but started to eat her sup-

per. Fay's depressed mood quickly spread to the others and the three fellow-boarders finished their humble meal in gloomy silence. When the supper was over Fay went to her bedroom and changed to the only dress she owned that was at all possible to wear at Stuart's party. It was threadworn and crumpled and, in all ways, inadequate to the occasion, but no one appreciated this fact better than Fay herself. She knew that among the clothes of the other women her own dress would be unfortunately conspicuous not only on account of its simplicity, but the condition to which long and hard service had reduced it. Her one pair of long gloves was far from fresh, and her white satin slippers were frayed and soiled, but heedless of her appearance as well as of all the consequences to which the party might lead, she doggedly obeyed the impulse that seemed for the moment to control her and to drive her on. When she was fully dressed she put on a long coat and, with Doris, started down-town. It was a gloomy silent ride they had together in the subway and both of them were glad when it was at an end. For the first time since they had known each other a barrier seemed to have risen between them, and for

the first time, neither of them could speak the truth which was in their hearts.

Fay reached the theater at her regular hour, but crossing the stage on her way to her dressing-room she met Morley, who, at least so it seemed to Fay, had been waiting for her.

"Miss Clayton," he said, "you weren't at the *matinée*. Why?"

Fay knew that she probably would have trouble on account of her absence, but her brain had been filled with other things, and she had given the matter but little thought. Somehow, her mind had seemed as indifferent to this as it had to everything else, but now the trouble was upon her, and very much sooner than she had expected.

"I'm afraid I have no excuse," she said weakly.

"Do you mean to tell me," Morley demanded, "that you weren't sick—that you have no doctor's certificate—nothing?"

Fay looked at him with scared terrified eyes.

"Nothing," she repeated. "There's no reason that I can give you."

By way of answer Morley shrugged his heavy shoulders and started across the stage, but when he had gone but a few steps, he stopped again.

"And, Miss Clayton," he called to her, "I think I'll give you your two weeks' notice now. You needn't go on after to-night. You can stop in at my office any day next week and get your salary."

Fay swung about, but with a great effort she checked the flow of words that sprang to her lips and which she wanted to hurl at the big burly figure retreating across the dimly-lighted stage. It was her last chance to tell him all she thought of him and the profession he dishonored. For months she had watched him, and his man, Sedley, trade opportunity on the stage for such favors as the women of the company would grant them. During all this time she had seen ability and hard work overlooked and pretty faces and easy morals pushed to the fore.

From the day that she had ignored Max Lusk, had definitely refused to accept his hospitality, and be seen with him in public places, she had fallen into disfavor. From that moment her opportunity for preferment was gone, and she knew it, and every member of the company knew it. It was on such scandal that the women with whom she worked seemed to live and thrive—it was the ozone of the rank stifling air of the dressing-rooms, and shut

out every clean decent thought from their narrow selfish lives.

All this and more she would have hurled at the self-complacent Morley, who had robbed her of her livelihood, but in his own world his power was absolute, and knowing this, Fay turned slowly back and, beaten and cowed, continued on her way to the dressing-room. Once there she immediately related the incident of her ignominious dismissal, because she preferred to tell of it in her own way before Morley had told of it in his to his particular favorites in the company. The news was greeted by the other girls with a chorus of sympathy and commiseration, and a great and noisy tirade against stage-managers in general and Morley in particular. But in five minutes or less, and to Fay's great relief, the subject was forgotten, and the talk turned to the promised wonders of Stuart's supper-party.

Her mind and body numb from the disasters of the day, Fay managed, somehow, to go through the performance, and to change to the clothes she was to wear at the dance. With indifference, she regarded the gorgeous gowns and the jewels with which the other women in the dressing-room, who

were going to the party, adorned themselves. She was as indifferent to their wonderful clothes and to their brilliant jewels as she was to the women who wore them—as she was indifferent to everything. When she was quite ready to go she turned for a last look at herself in the mirror, and her only thought was one of regret. “What a pity,” she sighed to the tired face in the glass, “such a pity that Porter didn’t let me end it all down there on the beach.”

When Fielding had returned to New York after his day with Fay at Pleasantville he had gone directly to the home of Blanche Wilmerding. He had formed no definite idea as to what he was going to say or to do, but, whatever the outcome, he felt that the sooner it was over the better it would be for every one concerned. He found her alone in the library, as if she had been awaiting his coming, and she received him in the same friendly way with which she had always welcomed him, but not as she might have been expected to welcome him after the events of the night before. She was sitting in a low chair at the far end of the hearth, and when she had given him her hand, and he had taken his

favorite stand with his back to the fireplace, she looked at him with a most assuring friendly smile.

"Well, Porter," she said, "it's up to you."

He clasped his hands behind him and looked back at the smiling interested face, but the man's face was hard-set, and there was no smile in his eyes nor on his lips. He was the chief, and, indeed, the only witness for the defense, and he showed that he realized his position thoroughly.

"The night before Fay Clayton left her home, about six months ago," he began, "she asked me to promise her that, if ever it should be her wish, I should return with her to Pleasantville. When I got home last night I found a note from her exacting the fulfilment of that promise. It may have been a purely sentimental idea, created by the keen regret she felt at leaving her home, a mere foolish whim of a very emotional girl, if you like, but be that as it may, I had made the promise."

He glanced at Blanche and found her looking steadily beyond him to the blazing logs in the fireplace.

"And—and you kept your promise?" she asked. Fielding nodded. "Yes, I kept my promise."

"And if it is right for me to ask," Blanche went

on, "can you tell me why she particularly wanted you to go back to Pleasantville with her, now—to-day?"

"Yes," he said, "I think I can. I had been a great deal to Fay—that is, as far as her life down there was concerned. We had grown up together; we had no other friends, we were together, always; in a way we had always loved each other. She went there to-day to see the place for the last time, and she wanted to have me with her. After all, it seems but a natural wish. If—"

"You said just now," Blanche interrupted him, "that she went there to see the place for the last time. Why the last time?"

For a moment Fielding hesitated and clenched his hands tightly behind him.

"Fay didn't intend to come back. She was tired, and sick, and terribly poor, and quite hopeless about the future. There was nothing beautiful in life left to her. She'd had enough—she wanted to quit, she—"

The girl before the fireplace suddenly threw up her hand for him to stop, and pressed the back of the other hand against her closed eyes.

"Stop," she begged, "please stop."

Save for the crackling of the logs and the ticking of the clock, the room was quite silent. It was the girl who spoke first. She took her hand from before her startled eyes and stretched it toward him. But he did not take it, and stood staring down at her, and for the first time she saw how tired and gray was his face.

"I'm so sorry, Porter," she said. "So very, very sorry for both of you. I know how awful a scene like that must have been to you. Forgive me, dear, won't you, for making you tell me?"

"I'm sorry, Blanche," he said, "but I haven't told you everything yet, and I've got to. I've got to do it, and I've got to do it now."

He pulled himself up very straight and looked down at her with his tired meaningless eyes.

"Last night," he said, "I told you that I had never loved Fay Clayton, and I guess I lied to you. But, before God, Blanche, I didn't mean to lie to you. It was only to-day, when I saw her sitting there with that damned bottle in her hand, that I knew how much I cared. I cared for her then as I have never cared for any one in this world, and I told her so."

Blanche pulled herself slowly out of her chair

and went over to a broad table in the center of the room and for some moments stood silent, looking down at the magazines, arranged in neat rows on the table.

"I'm sorry, Porter," she said at last, still looking down at the magazines. "I know just to say that I'm sorry doesn't sound very adequate, but I don't know exactly what I should say. Of course, I'm glad for you that you found out, and I'm glad for Miss Clayton's sake, too, because she's made a good fight of it, and then, I'm sure she's fine all through. I guess that's all, Porter, except I hope that you'll be very happy together, but, of course, I'm sure you'll both be that—very, very happy."

"Fay's not going to marry me," Fielding said bluntly, "that is, if that is what you mean."

He glanced at Blanche and the glow from a big yellow-shaded lamp on the table showed the look of complete surprise on her pale tired face.

"You mean," she said, "that she *won't* marry you?"

"That's is," Fielding went on doggedly. "She says I was ashamed of her, and in a way, she's right. I wasn't ashamed of her, but I was ashamed of her friends, and I neglected her terribly. I suppose I

was afraid that she'd stand in my way, and so I threw her aside, just as I threw every one else aside who I didn't think could help. Things came too easy for a while, I suppose, and I lost my head. That's all—I was selfish and I lost my head."

When he looked at Blanche again he found her regarding him with dull curious eyes, as if he were a stranger, and she could not understand his presence there.

"What a lot of trouble you've made, Porter," she said, "what a lot of trouble for every one—for that poor Clayton girl, and for yourself, and for me, and for dear old dad. He was so happy last night—just like a kid."

"I suppose," Fielding said, "I had better speak to him now—at once."

But Blanche shook her head.

"No, Porter. I'd rather do that myself. We're such pals, dad and I. I think, perhaps, I could make him understand, or—or I guess I'll tell him it was my fault, and that I had changed my mind. That will make things better for you—I mean better for you, at the office."

"Thank you," Fielding said. "It's just like you,

Blanche, to think of me and my future when all I deserve is to be ordered out of your house."

"Oh, you mustn't talk like that, Porter," she said. "It was much better for you to be honest—much better. Good night."

She held out a cold nerveless hand, and he took it limply in his own. "And sometime," she went on in the same even voice, "some of these days, you will come to see us again, won't you? I'll write you when to come. Good night again."

"Thank you," he said, "you've been very kind—kinder, I know, than any one has ever been to me before."

Without looking at the girl's face again, he dropped her hand. And with the knowledge that he was leaving the wreck of every hope and of every ambition of his youth behind him, he went slowly out of the room.

When he had reached the pavement his footsteps turned mechanically toward his own home. It was just past seven o'clock and the avenue was filled with automobiles, and taxicabs, and carriages taking people to dinner. He looked at the smiling faces and the pretty light-colored dresses of the women

and wondered that he felt no resentment or envy of any kind. In a dazed sort of way he realized that, after all, the fault had all been his. There was no one on whom he could shift the blame of his tragedy even had he wished to do so: everything that this world could give had been granted him, and he had thrown it away. And then, of a sudden, he discovered that he had unconsciously quickened his steps and that his one great desire was to get back to his own rooms. He wanted to be alone, and, alone, to try and find out how some new structure could be reared from the chaos to which he had razed his own life.

Once at home he lighted his pipe and poured himself out a glass of Scotch. The drink would make him think the better, he argued, and now was the moment for him to think and to act quickly. He lighted the fire, and for a long time sat gazing dully at the burning logs and wondering why his brain refused to act or failed to grasp the extreme seriousness of his position. It was well enough for Blanche to tell her father that it was she who had erred, but how was he to be sure that her father would believe her, or that in case he questioned her, she would not break down and sob out the

whole miserable truth. He filled his glass again, and when his pipe went out, he was greatly surprised to find that he lacked the effort or the desire to re-light it. The long hard day and the endless nervous strain had begun to tell on him at last, and just as he had finished his second glass of Scotch, he fell into a heavy feverish sleep.

CHAPTER XII

IT WAS three hours later when Fielding awoke, and glancing at the clock, found that it was a quarter to eleven. For some time he sat gazing dully at the embers on the hearth, wondering how long it had been since he had fallen asleep and trying to bring order out of his confused thoughts. And then, of a sudden, all the miserable scenes of that dreary day of tragedy suddenly flashed through his tired brain like a series of shafts of lightning. He pulled himself to his feet, buttoned his coat about him, and took a few rapid turns up and down the room, for it was very cold. His first thought was to undress and go at once to bed, but then he remembered that he had had no dinner, and he decided to go to a restaurant and get the best supper that money could buy. He was not hungry, but the night was yet young and he dreaded to be alone with his unhappy thoughts. A cold bath restored his circulation and cleared his brain, and when he had put on his evening clothes he started forth. At

the avenue he hesitated, uncertain which way to turn, but he saw the lights at Martin's at Twenty-sixth Street, and decided to go there for his solitary supper. Even if he found no one there whom he knew, there would, at least, be a crowd, and music, and good things to eat and drink, and the chance to forget.

He found a little side-table unoccupied, and in a short time, through the aid of several cocktails and a bottle of champagne, he had, to a great extent, forgotten his troubles and was regarding the future from a viewpoint entirely artificial but roseate in the extreme.

It was nearly one o'clock, and most of the crowd in the restaurant had gone, when two men whom he knew slightly passed his table. They stopped for a moment to speak to him and comment on his lonely appearance, and then, as they started on their way again, one of them called back to him: "Why don't you come on up-stairs to Jimmie Stuart's party? Every good-looking girl in town's there. Jimmy's giving a perfectly good party. Better come along."

"Much obliged," Fielding said, "but I don't think I know him."

Both of the men laughed uproariously. In their

exhilarated condition they would probably have laughed at anything, but this remark of Fielding's seemed to strike them as particularly humorous.

"That's all right," one of them explained, "Jimmy told me to ask any one I wanted. A dozen men more or less won't make any difference with that crowd up there."

Fielding had always made it a fixed rule to avoid the kind of supper-parties he supposed this one to be. When men had invited him to them he had refused because he did not believe that they would appeal to him, and because he also feared that they would hurt him in a business way. But now, in his present optimistic state of mind, he cared nothing for his business position, and was ready and eager for any kind of amusement that offered itself.

"All right," he said, "I'll go."

The two young men waited while he paid his check and then he went with them to the supper-rooms up-stairs.

The whole floor was given over to the party, and a few minutes after his arrival Fielding had lost his two friends and was wandering alone through the brilliantly lighted rooms. He found them filled with many exhilarated men and more wonderfully

dressed and sprightly women from the musical comedies.

He noticed that many of the men and not a few of the women were smoking, and so he lighted a cigarette, and accepted the proffer of a glass of champagne from a passing waiter. While he had but slight desire to mingle more intimately with the crowd, he found much pleasure in watching its innocent, if somewhat boisterous, antics. Some of the men he knew slightly, but they welcomed him with enthusiasm, and although he had never met any of the women, many of them greeted the good-looking newcomer with marked signs of friendliness. And Fielding, with smiles of gratitude and pleasure, acknowledged their welcome.

It was much more gay and amusing and brilliant than any dance he had ever seen. In addition to the sensuous music, the golden glow of the warm rooms, the real and artificial beauty of the women, and their gorgeous and exquisite clothes, there was an air of natural gaiety abroad and a spirit of abandon that appealed to him greatly and satisfied his senses completely. His troubles became purely imaginary, and then vanished completely before this vision of false fairy-land. Supremely happy and

content again, he continued to smoke his cigarette, sip his glass of champagne, and look on with wide-open admiring eyes at the brilliant and sensuous passing show.

Eventually it occurred to him that he had not yet met his host, and his slowly moving mind having reached the conclusion that this social tradition, however trivial, should be accomplished at once, he started in search of any mutual friend who would introduce him. He had gone but a few steps, however, when he was confronted by a pink and white face and a pair of large, blue, pathetic eyes. She was a very pretty girl with a small slight figure which was but ill-concealed in a clinging dress of black tulle and jet, and which seemed to have been made especially to show off her wonderfully white and perfectly molded arms and exquisitely rounded throat. Her manner was far from bold but rather intensely pleading.

"Won't you *please* dance with me?" she begged. "I do so want to dance and nobody seems to care for me any more."

Under the circumstances further words were quite useless, and smiling his extreme pleasure, Fielding put his arm about the girl, and they started to dance.

When they had reached the far end of the room he unconsciously looked over his partner's shoulder, and his glance fell upon a girl with wonderful red hair and a white dress conspicuous for its simplicity. At the next turn of the waltz he looked again and then he knew that it was Fay. She was sitting against the wall on one of the long rows of chairs that lined the room, and was smiling gaily and chattering volubly to the young man next to her. Fielding suddenly stopped dancing, and mumbling a few words of apology, led his unknown partner to a seat at the other end of the room, and then, without further ceremony, left her there, surprised and indignant.

Fay did not see Fielding until he stood directly before her, and then she looked up at him with wide-open eyes of surprise and astonishment.

"Why, Porter," she gasped, "what are you doing here?"

Ignoring her question, he squared his shoulders and looked her straight in the eyes. "May I speak to you for a moment?" he asked.

His manner, as well as his speech, was so abrupt, even rude, that Fay, in fear of a scene, turned quickly to the man to whom she had been talking

and asked to be excused, promising to return to him in a few minutes. Somewhat surprised and confused by Fielding's sudden appearance on the scene, the young man quickly got up, smiled and bowed his assent to the unexpected interruption of his tête-à-tête, and then calmly settled back in his seat to wait for Fay's return.

Fay took Fielding's arm, and in silence he led her slowly through the whirling mass of dancers to a little room, directly across the hall from the ball-room, and where they were quite alone. She leaned against a table and folded her arms. Experience had taught her something of how to deal with men whose nerves were on edge from too much champagne, and she was not afraid.

"Well, Porter," she said, "what is it?"

His face was hard-set and white with anger, and she saw with how great an effort he was trying to control himself.

"I want to know," he demanded, "what you are doing at a place like this? Why do you choose to associate with women of this kind? You know what kind of women they are as well as I do. Why, I ask you?"

Fay shrugged her shoulders and forced an unwilling smile to her lips.

"Why?" she repeated. "Because these women are my friends; these are the women I work with. I'm not ashamed of them."

"Then you mean," Fielding threw at her, "that you have deliberately sunk to this sort of thing?"

For a moment Fay hesitated and stared indifferently into Fielding's eyes.

"Really, Porter," she said, "there doesn't seem to be anything else. I tried starving in complete respectability, and I wanted to try suicide, but you wouldn't let me. I told you it would have been much better if you had let me have my way—much better for every one,—better for me, and better for you, and better for Blanche Wilmerding. Did you tell her—I mean about what happened to-day?"

Fielding nodded. "Yes, I told her."

"And she threw you out?"

"Yes, she threw me out."

Fay rested her hands on the edge of the table, and throwing up her chin, smiled at the ceiling as if she had found something amusing in the gaudy frescoes.

"I'm glad you think it's something to laugh at," Fielding said.

Fay glanced at him, and then beyond to the ballroom, filled with its crowd of laughing boisterous dancers.

"I wasn't smiling at that," she said. "I was thinking how funny it was that after six months both of us should come to this." She nodded toward the noisy ballroom. "Do you remember the wonderful plans we laid out with such care for ourselves, the successes that were to come to us so easily? Six short months ago—just think of it—and now here we are, two derelicts! Two derelicts stranded on a hostile shore, our youth wrecked by our own foolish acts! Why, Porter, we don't count even in a crowd like this."

Fielding put out his hand and grasped her tightly by the arm.

"We still have each other," he whispered. "Come away with me, and if we stick together, we can win out yet in spite of everything. I still have my position, and—"

She shook her arm free, and her eyes blazed with indignation.

"You're crazy," she said, "and I'm sorry to say it,

Porter, but you're not yourself. Do you want me to tell you what I really think of you as a man?"

Fielding pulled himself up very straight and looked her squarely in the eyes. The manner and words of the girl seemed suddenly to have sobered him and brought him to a realization of his position.

"Yes," he said, "please go on. I want you to tell me."

"I think," she began, and her voice was very even and without apparent feeling of any kind, "I think, Porter, I have always thought, that with your friendship I would have had a chance. I believe that with you to turn to I might have won out even against the odds that every poor good-looking girl must beat out in this big, heartless, rotten town. My love for you was the one thing that counted in my life, and always had counted. It was the one thing which I clung to, and that kept alive my hope for the future. It was the intangible safeguard that most girls get at their mother's knee. And you threw that away. Yes, you did, Porter. You were selfish and ambitious, and you threw it away. You hurt me, and you hurt me again and again, until I grew to understand you, and until you had crushed out every spark of love I ever had for you. If I—"

"Then tell me," he interrupted her fiercely, "if you felt as you say you do, why did you ask me to go with you to-day to Pleasantville?"

"Because," she said, "I didn't ask the Porter Fielding that I know to-day to go with me. I asked the Porter Fielding I used to know. I tried to be as bright and gay as I could. I tried to be like my old self, and to make you feel toward me as you used to feel, and to be your old self. It was to be my last day, and all that I wanted was a few hours of happiness with the only man with whom I had ever known any happiness. That was all. If I had known that it was to make trouble between you and Blanche Wilmerding, and be the end of all your ambitions for money and everything else that you have wished for all of your selfish life, then I shouldn't have asked you that last favor. I'd have gone to Pleasantville alone. I'm sorry for you. I'm sorry for what I did, and I'm sorry for what I've said, but now I am done with you."

Fielding took a step nearer her, and held out his arms unsteadily toward her, but she shrank back from him.

"Don't touch me," she whispered. "I'm done with you, I tell you, I'm done with you."

But Fielding, maddened beyond reason, took another step nearer her, his hand closed tightly about her arm, and his fingers sank into her soft flesh.

"I don't care," he said hoarsely, "whether you are done with me or not, but I am going to take you away from this damned place."

Too quick to stop her, Fielding saw Fay suddenly throw up her free hand and beckon to some one who was passing the open doorway. Turning, he saw come into the room a young man, who was unlike most of the others at the dance in that he seemed quite calm and his face unflushed. Fielding watched him quickly cross the room and stand by Fay's side.

"What can I do for you, Miss Clayton?" the young man asked.

"This is a friend of mine, Mr. Stuart," Fay stammered. "He's not himself—he's been drinking and he insists on taking me home. I want you to send him away."

Stuart looked at Fielding and then, for the first time, saw the hand clasped with a grip of steel about Fay's wrist.

"Drop that hand," he said, "and get out. This is my party, and Miss Clayton is here with me."

But Fielding did not loosen his hold on Fay's arm and continued to glare dully into Stuart's eyes.

"I don't give a damn whose party it is," he shouted, "but this is no place for a decent woman. I'm going to—"

He did not finish the sentence, for suddenly Stuart's arm shot out from his thick-set body and Fielding, with a low cry of pain, lay sprawling on the table.

It was over—quickly and quietly over—and in no way disturbed the joyous riot of the neighboring ballroom. A few of the revelers, passing the door a little later, noticed Fielding's prostrate form lying across the table, but they hurried on their way, their minds at rest with the charitable thought that if a fellow-guest preferred sleep rather than the pleasures of the waltz, it was, after all, his own affair.

When he opened his eyes Fielding found himself alone. Stunned, his mind a blank, with uncertain steps he groped his way out of the room. A few of the passing guests, in a spirit of levity, brushed against the tottering good-looking youth, and several times he almost lost his footing and fell, but at last he reached the coat-room at the end of the hallway. A waiter, winking significantly to his fellow-

servants at the young man's shifting blood-shot eyes and disheveled condition, helped him on with his overcoat and handed him his hat. And then, with a great air of personal solicitude, the waiter led Fielding to the door and guided him down the marble staircase to the cool invigorating air of the open street.

When Fay awoke the next day, it was past noon. For some time she lay staring up at the ceiling, and one by one, she reviewed the incidents of the previous day—her visit to Pleasantville, the row with Porter at Stuart's dance, and her peremptory dismissal from the company. It was the last that caused her the greatest concern, and she suddenly determined that she must see Doris at once and decide what could best be done in regard to seeking future employment. The prospect for stage work she knew was very bad, as only two or three days before, she had heard Doris say that she had tried to get a position for a girl friend and had failed utterly. She dressed quickly and went out to the sitting-room, but she found the place quite deserted. Mr. Hooker was indulging in the unusual luxury of a Sunday promenade, and Doris had gone downtown and had left a note saying that she would not

return until after lunch. Fay went over to the window and with unappreciative eyes stood looking out on the brilliant sunshine. Her mind was filled with unhappy thoughts of the day just gone and the immediate future surely held out to her but scant hope. Her mind and body seemed to sag from too much trouble, and she thoroughly realized how desperate was her position.

The bell to the flat rang out shrilly through the deserted rooms, and believing that Mr. Hooker had returned from his walk, she hurried to the door. In the dimly lighted hallway she recognized the insignificant bowing figure and the smirking countenance of Max Lusk. Even in the semi-darkness her surprise at seeing him again was easily evident, but she received him as graciously as she knew how, and led him to the sitting-room. Lusk declined to remove his overcoat, but as he sank into Mr. Hooker's favorite rocking-chair, he threw the coat wide open, so that Fay might properly admire its sealskin lining. In his right hand he held his silver-mounted cane as if it had been a staff, and with his left hand he toyed with his shining silk hat. When Fay told him that Doris and Mr. Hooker

were out he sighed regretfully, but in conspicuous contrast, his beady eyes twinkled with pleasure.

"Too bad, too bad," he said, "I just dropped in to say good-by. I'm sailing on Tuesday for Bremen."

Fay looked at the puny little figure and the putty grinning face and thought what great good fortune some people had and how curiously this world's goods were distributed. But what she said was:

"It sounds good to me, Mr. Lusk. Is it a business or a pleasure trip?"

Lusk cocked his head to one side and indulged in a mysterious secretive smile. "That all depends. If I go with just the party I hope to, I fear there won't be very much doing in the way of business." His face suddenly assumed a look of genuine concern. "I was sorry to hear of your trouble with Morley," he added; "he's a brute. If I'd known anything about it I certainly shouldn't have let him give you your notice, not for a minute."

"I don't suppose you know of anything else?" Fay asked.

Lusk rested his chin on the head of his cane and gloomily shook his head.

"It was too bad of you, Miss Clayton, to ignore me, and to refuse to see me, for all of that long time. I knew of several good things for a bright pretty girl—you know what I mean—bits and small parts, showy little things that you could have done splendidly."

"And now they're all gone?" Fay asked gloomily.

"All gone," Lusk sighed. "It's the very worst time in the year, I suppose, to get out of a job in your business. All the fall shows well set and nothing doing now until the spring. If I were to be here it might be different. Perhaps I could get you something, but I sail on the *Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse* on Tuesday."

"You'll be gone long?" Fay asked.

The mask of gloom gradually faded from the little broker's face. There was a smile in his eyes and on his lips. He got up, and laying aside his hat and cane, stood before the stove, and spread out his jeweled hands behind him.

"Oh, no, not for long," he said, "two or three months, perhaps. Just enough to escape the worst of the cold weather over here and get back in time to see the new spring shows open. I have a big interest in a couple of them."

He let his beady shifting eyes rest for a moment on Fay, long enough to be quite sure that she thoroughly understood the true significance of all he said.

"If I go alone," he went on, "I shall stay for a few weeks in Germany and visit some of my people and do a little business. But if I don't go alone—bah to Germany! A couple of days will be enough for Baden, and then scurry away to Paris—dear old Paris! the city where every man and every woman are happy. A week will be enough for the lady to buy plenty of pretty clothes and hats, and enough, perhaps, too, for a visit to the jewelry shops along the Rue de la Paix. And then we're off for the Riviera in a comfortable car with a good French chauffeur—Nice and Monte Carlo!—a sight of the great people of all the world taking their ease, and just at the top of the season, eh! That would be some trip for a girl with the man who would give her everything she wanted, some trip! Orange sunshine, and the best French cooking, and the blue Mediterranean, and a man who would back you to the limit at Monte Carlo! Better than a stuffy little flat in Harlem, and starvation, eh, what?"

A few months before, when he had chosen to in-

sult Fay Clayton, her answer had been a blow in the face, but now it seemed that Lusk had no fear of personal violence whatever, and smiling and bowing, he moved a few steps nearer to her.

"That would be a fine trip, eh, Miss Clayton," he said, leering into her pale face—"a great chance for a girl to see the world? What do you say, Fay?"

"When did you say you sailed?" she asked.

Lusk drew a roll of bills from his pocket and tossed it on the center table.

"Something for a little necessary shopping for the voyage," he said. "We shall sail on Tuesday—Tuesday at noon. You might ring me up in the morning, at my office."

Fay bowed her head in assent, and Lusk, assuming a smiling and jaunty air, moved toward the door.

"I shall call you up to-morrow morning at the office," she said. "I suppose there will be many little things that I shall have to ask you."

"To-morrow morning," he repeated, and placing his silk hat over his heart, he made her a low bow of mock servility. And thus, at last as the conqueror, he took his leave.

The first definite conclusion that Fay reached was that she would tell Doris and old man Hooker that she was leaving on Tuesday morning to visit some old friends in the neighborhood of Pleasantville. The truth would only hurt them and must inevitably result in endless arguments that in no way could affect her ultimate decision. The decision made, she at once began the preparations for her departure. Her mind a blank, her soul numb, her conscience a thing warped and thrown to the winds, she proceeded with deliberation to her own undoing. Fay Clayton had turned to the oldest and the most pitiful excuse of weak men and emotional women—fate. For the moment she was willing to believe that inexorable fate in the person of one Max Lusk had laid its heavy hand upon her, and fate could not be denied. But, at least, fate had come supplied with plenty of money—enough for her own immediate needs, and a substantial balance to leave to her fellow-lodgers.

When Doris returned to the apartment late that afternoon Fay told her at once of her dismissal from the company and of her proposed visit to her friends in the country. Confused as her mind was, it assumed a certain degree of craftiness. With a

fine regard to the details of her plans she lied to Doris, and her story was believed.

The next morning she went down-town and made the purchases which, earlier in the day, Lusk had assured her were essential to the ocean voyage, but not for a moment was the girl more than half-conscious of what she was doing. Over and over again, she saw in quick succession Lusk's gray putty face bowing himself out of the door, Fielding as he fell unconscious across the table at Stuart's party, and Stuart himself, with his virile thick-set frame, bulldog jaw, and sympathetic appealing eyes.

It was two o'clock when she had finished her purchases, and with her arms filled with bundles, was hurrying on her way to the subway station at Times Square. Just as she passed the Knickerbocker, Stuart came out of the hotel and met her face to face. It was impossible to avoid him, and so she stopped, her head lowered, and her cheeks on fire.

"Such a day's shopping," he laughed, "you must have come into a legacy."

Fay glanced at him and then down at the parcels. Somehow, it seemed impossible to lie to this man, and, after all, what difference could it make now?

"No, not a legacy," she said. "I'm going abroad

to-morrow. I'm going abroad to Bremen, and Paris, and Monte Carlo. Congratulate me."

Stuart was holding a cigarette between his fingers, but at her words he let it fall to the pavement, and then carefully stamped out the fire with his heel.

"Do you mean," he asked, "that you are married?"

Fay looked at him with scared confused eyes, and shook her head.

"No," she said, "I'm not married. Just a trip abroad—Bremen, and Paris, and Monte Carlo."

Stuart tapped the pavement slowly with his stick, glanced at Fay, and then back at the hotel, and then at the high bill-boards over the shops across the street.

"You're sailing to-morrow?" he said, with his un-seeing eyes now fixed on the packages under her arm. "To-morrow," he repeated, "it seems so soon."

From a world of worldly knowledge his mind was groping about for a word, an argument, a story that would put to rout this tragedy. People were passing them, jostling them, as they stood facing each other on the crowded thoroughfare. Somehow he resented the sun shining from a clear blue sky, and the noise of the traffic and the rumble of the cars

fairly bellowed in his ears. Surely in the archives of his full happy life there was something, some moral, some word of hope, that he could offer the distraught mind of this girl, standing impotently before him, that would make her see things as they really were. Was there no experience in his whole life that fitted him to hold a brief for virtue and clean living? He saw a woman, who, in his heart, he cared for tremendously, a soul, as yet pure, clad in blue serge, and white gloves and patent leather shoes, bound straight for hell—hell surely in this world and whatever hell the next world provides—and yet he found his tongue was dry and powerless. Weakly he put out his hand, but his voice was unnaturally high and resonant.

“Good-by,” he said, “and good luck to you. But, good God, will nothing stop you? You’re the one thing in this rotten town that I’d have gambled on. I’d have staked my life on you. Let me come and see you this afternoon, to-night, any time—let me talk to you, before you go, won’t you?”

With frightened unseeing eyes, Fay tried to look into his. She slowly gathered her bundles under one arm and put out her hand to take the one held out to her, but, somehow, their outstretched hands

never met, and the crowds of the street came between them and carried them apart.

All the arrangements for her departure Fay had learned by telephone from Lusk, and the next morning found her lying on the lounge in her stateroom, a dry-eyed, miserably unhappy, nervous wreck of her former self. It was not until the big boat was well on its way down the bay that she found the physical strength and the courage to venture on deck. To her great relief there was no one near, and so she leaned on the rail and watched the high buildings of New York slowly disappear through the gray mists of the winter morning. Whatever evil the future might bring her, thank God, that was over! The great towers—the emblem of huge industries—the blaring show of wealth and prosperity, that blotted out the weak and poor under the shadow of its ostentatious splendor, were fading before her tired weary eyes. At least she had made good her escape before the big cruel city had completely crushed her poor pretty body into oblivion.

"Good morning," she heard a cool pleasant voice saying to her, and looking over her shoulder, she saw Jimmy Stuart standing at her side.

"What are you doing here?" she demanded. Her

voice was steady enough, but she was conscious that her body was trembling from her head to her feet.

Stuart folded his arms over the rail, and disregarding her angry eyes, stared calmly and smilingly into the white-capped waters of the bay.

"Meaning me?" he chuckled. "What am I doing here? I'm by way of being a rescuing party. Like all rescuing parties, I suppose I lack the initiative of discovery, but, also, like all rescuing parties, I'm hoping to come in for most of the glory."

"How did you know," she asked, "that I was sailing on this boat?"

"That's easy," he laughed, "there was only one boat sailing to-day."

"Do you know," she asked, "why I am here? Do you know with whom I am making this trip? It almost seems as if you might have spared me this last humiliation."

Stuart gathered his arms closer about his body and stared with renewed interest at the passing waters.

"I can make a pretty good guess who you are with," he said. "I saw that bounder, Lusk, just now, trying to engage two places at the captain's table. I hate to be brusque, Miss Clayton, but the situ-

ation seems to demand it. Do you mind telling me how much you owe him?"

"I certainly do," Fay threw back at him. "What right have you to ask a question like that?"

"Because," Stuart answered, "I've got to pay him back the money, and as it's not a very pleasant thing to do, I'd rather get it over, and have it off my mind."

Fay looked steadily at Stuart and settled herself more comfortably against the rail.

"Do you think, Mr. Stuart," she asked, "that your money is any better than Mr. Lusk's?"

"Bless your soul, yes," he laughed. "Don't you know your New York any better than that? Lusk's money is all tainted. Yes, it is—perfectly good, but yet tainted money. How much did you say it was?"

Fay turned from him and for a long time looked at the ghostlike shores, fast vanishing behind the banks of mist that rolled in from the sea. Once more it seemed as if inexorable fate had interfered in her affairs and again would brook no denial. As a matter of fact she loved Jimmy Stuart for his unwarranted intervention, and would have liked to throw her arms about his neck and cry away her sorrows on his broad shoulders, but, instead, she

only turned back to him and said: "Mr. Lusk gave me three hundred dollars, and he paid for my passage on the boat."

"That's fine," Stuart cried. "I always knew he was a piker. You wait here for me, won't you?"

Before Fay could answer him he had gone, and with blurred eyes she watched him hurrying down the deck, whistling as he went.

In ten minutes he was back again.

"It's all right," he laughed, "and do you know he had the nerve to ask me the same question you did—why my money was any better than his."

"You mean," she asked, "that you paid him—everything?"

"You bet I paid him everything," he said, "and I also volunteered the information that if he ever dared to speak to you or even look at you again on the voyage I'd break his head for him. I think he thought I was going to do it, anyhow, because as soon as I gave him the money, he ran down the gangway like a scared rabbit."

Fay stuck her hands deep into the pockets of her ulster, and looked steadily into the young man's eyes.

"Mr. Stuart," she said, "you're the most curious

man I ever knew. You are just like Jimmy Stuart and nobody else. I don't understand you at all."

Stuart leaned his back against the rail and shook his head, and smiled at her.

"No," he said, "I'm really not curious—I'm abnormally normal—that's all. I don't have to be curious. I was just born understanding. For instance, I have always understood you. When I first knew you I was quite sure that intrinsically you were in many ways the finest woman I had ever met; and by all odds the most amusing—that is, when you had your health and your spirits with you—but I also knew that you were terribly sensitive, and emotional, and fearfully and wonderfully misunderstood. A great asset, if handled properly, but, good lord! how you did mismanage the property. Whew! You know I have to shudder when I think of how near you came to making a mess of it. You'd better go to your stateroom now and doll yourself up for lunch. Suppose you meet me here in half an hour. I've engaged two splendid places at the most inconspicuous end of the doctor's table."

For six days Stuart seldom left her side, and with fairly good weather, one can learn much, and forget much, during six days at sea. They walked

the deck together for miles, morning, noon and night, and sat for hours in their steamer chairs, side by side, and read amusing stories and thrilling detective tales to each other. They played shuffle-board by themselves, and they laughed and talked together of the present, but never of the past or of the future. And, gradually, Stuart saw the color come back to Fay's cheeks and the old light into her eyes. It was on the night of the sixth day out, and they were sitting together, as they always sat together for a while on deck after dinner, that he decided that it was not only wise but necessary to speak of the future.

"To-morrow," he said, "we shall reach Bremen—good old Bremen!"

"Have you ever been to Bremen?" she asked.

"No," he admitted cheerfully, "but I love it as the first stopping place of the return of the rescuing party, and the first ground we've put our feet on since we started on our little journey of contentment."

"Then you're glad to have been a rescuing party," she asked, "and you've been content?"

"Yes," he said, "and more, oh! a great deal more."

For a few moments they sat in silence, listening to

the steady beat of the engines and looking out on the black rolling waters and the purple starlit sky.

"I'm glad of that," she said at last. "I owe you such an awful lot."

"It has been fun," he admitted, "wonderful fun. It's a pity about Bremen to-morrow, but I suppose there's a lot of foolish passengers on board who want to get to work, or to see their families, or something. And there's the mails—it's funny how many people like to get letters. It really seems as if the work of the rescuing party was over—at least, in a way, it's over."

"Well, after all," she said, "it was a great success as a rescuing party, for you found the one who was lost, and brought her safely into port. But I'm afraid your troubles aren't quite over yet. There's the further debt for the expenses of a few days at the hotel at Bremen, and then my passage back to Broadway—Broadway and the managers' offices. I fear there's a good deal more than glory to a rescuing party. It doesn't seem to be a very cheap short-cut to fame."

"Broadway," Stuart repeated dreamily, "the Great White Way. I know a place—in fact I own it. It's a farm left me by my revered ancestors on

the eastern shore of the good old state of Maryland. It's a regular farm, with a whitewashed fence, and a truck garden, and two automobiles, and lots of cows, and chickens, and pigs, and neighbors who live in knickerbockers and have polo ponies to sell, and marvelous appetites for mint juleps. The old house itself is conspicuous for six beautiful fat round pillars that hold up the roof of the porch, and a few of the original clapboards left me by my ancestors. There is also a wonderful path leading to the house, lined with box—all of which makes the outside look most ancient and respectable and beautiful. But inside there are many tiled bath-tubs, which my ancestors would probably have hated, and many deep leather chairs, which they would have loved. In a word, it's the sort of place that appeals to a man like myself, who wants to play at farming and live his life in peace and content. An added attraction that I forgot to mention is a bubbling stream that runs right through the dairy, but the most wonderful thing about the farm is the circle of hills that surrounds it. The hills are all covered with birch and pine, and these trees shoot up so high that with the exception of the sun and moon and the stars, they shut out the light from every part of the world. The

highest electric globe on the highest sign on Broadway could never be seen from my farm."

"What do you call your farm," she asked, "Paradise?"

"No," he said, "it's called 'Rest Farm'. Fay, it occurred to me that if you didn't like the hotel at Bremen, we might hurry on to Paris to join my mother and sister. They're stopping there for the winter. We could be married at once."

Fay clasped her hands behind her head and stared hard at the silver stars, shining with a wonderful crystal whiteness from the vast stretch of purple sky.

"Jimmy," she said, "you know that I have been starved and bruised in body, and soul, and mind; and when there seems to be nothing left for me at all you come to me and offer me all this—your home and peace for the rest of my days. Do you think you are being quite fair to yourself? You haven't known me so very long or so very well. How do you know I care enough for you, and not for just the home and the chance to start again?"

"If you don't care enough now," he said, "all I ask is the chance to make you care. Fay, dear, won't you give me the chance? I would try so hard to make you care, always."

"If I only could," she whispered, "if I only could. I could have, once—only six months ago—but, Jimmy, I can't any more. There's this trip back of me now, and a lot of foolish things I did when I was crazy and didn't care—all those parties, and the people I ran with. You know the old saying about the 'name and the game'. The time has come when I've got to pay the cost."

"The cost of what?" he asked. "You've been through the fire and you've come out unscathed."

"Not quite," she said. "I tell you I've got to pay the cost—the cost of unsought knowledge, the kind of knowledge that is thrust on every unprotected girl in a big city like New York."

Stuart stared at the rail moving slowly up and down against the black water.

"Of all the women I know," he said, "I would rather lead you by the hand to my mother, and say to her: 'Mother, I have brought you a daughter. In her I have found an end to all of my troubles. The feverish useless life I have led is over.'"

With a little sigh of content Fay let her head sink against the back of the chair. Through her closed eyelids she saw a great white light, and years of peace and calm content stretching before her.

She put out her hand and closed it tightly over Stuart's. When she spoke her voice scarcely rose above the whirl of the big ship as it cut through the huge waves, annihilating space, and rushing her on her way to the goal of happiness.

"All right, Jimmy," she said, "if you can say that to your mother, and be sure you mean it, I'll go with you to Paris."

He raised her hand to his lips and kissed it, and then leaned so close to her that they could see clearly into each other's eyes.

"I mean it so much," he said, "that I would like to make you a promise—a promise to do anything that you want me to do—I mean now or at any time hereafter."

Fay continued to look into his eyes, which for once had turned serious, and laughed gaily, just as she used to laugh when she was a girl at Pleasantville.

"No, Jimmy," she said, "you've promised me enough for to-night." And then, with a sudden misgiving, he saw her wrinkle her forehead and draw her eyebrows close together.

"What is it, dear?" he asked.

"I was thinking," she said, "that there is one

thing that you could do for me, and I'd like to have you do it right away. Send a wireless to Doris, and say that I am with you, and that we are on our way to visit your mother and your sister at Paris, and that we are going to be married."

"Sure I will," he cried, and jumped to his feet. "Isn't there some one else I can send a message to for you?"

Fay sat up straight in her chair and stretched out her hand toward him and let it lay close in his.

"No, thank you," she said. "You won't be long gone, will you? And don't forget to say that we are going to be married."

She took away her hand, and with a little sigh of content, once more dropped back into her chair.

"That's a wonderful word, Jimmy," she murmured. "Did you ever stop to think how wonderful it is, and all that it can mean—that word, married? I don't believe I have ever thought much about it myself before; but now I know that it is the most beautiful word in the whole wide world."

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